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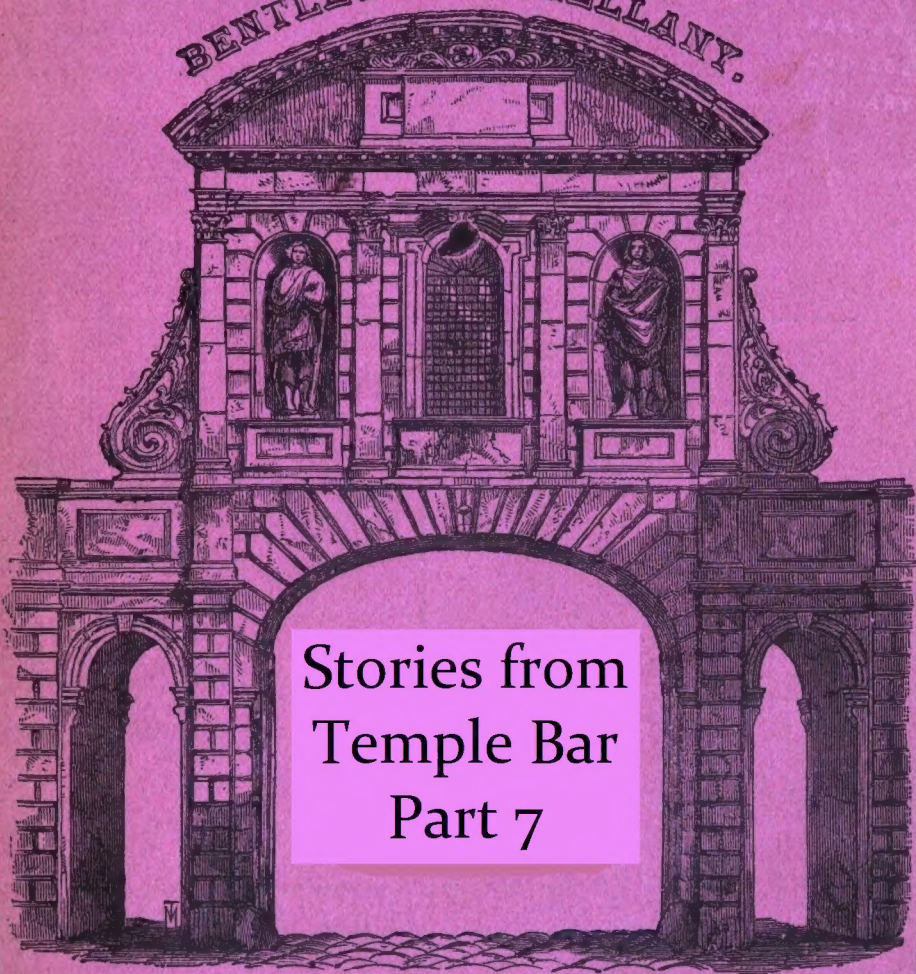
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TEMPLE BAR

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED

BENTLEY'S MISCELLANY.



Stories from
Temple Bar
Part 7

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Stories from Temple Bar, Part 7 (1902-1905)

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A Word of Ethe.

AN easterly wind blew strongly that hot July morning, and the little white village in the forest was filled with a mingled odour of dust and strawberries, for the fruit-gatherers had just come in with their fragrant baskets. East and west ran the road, white as the houses, emerging from the encompassing woodland for the brief two hundred yards of the village, then plunging again into the green depths to meet other white roads that wound for long miles through that living emerald. And over all was the burning blue of the summer sky.

The wind rose higher, coming in gusts, and a thick white pillar of dust whirled up the street, then broke into scattered clouds, powdering the roofs, falling underfoot, rolling away into the woods. When the dust column had passed, it left a man standing at the end of the street, as though he had stepped out of that wild eddy; a fantastic figure, tall, alert; in shabby black trousers, white flannel shirt, a long black scarf wound round his waist, and a large, much battered white felt hat. His pipe or flageolet seemed but the hollow stem of some umbelliferous plant; yet, when he put it to his lips, the sound that he drew from that poor instrument startled the loungers in front of the hotel as though a breath of flame had passed over them.

For it was a wondrous tumult of harmonies, like the rush of the wind in the forest; it was the music heard by Carolan the Bard when he slept on the fairy hill; it was Father Odin's chant in battle; it was Orpheus singing amid the frenzied chorus of the Bacchantes: and as the walls of Thebes rose to witchery of music, so rose in each hearer's soul the fairy palace of his dreams, whether of the shining past or the glowing future; to some only a dim vision of impossible rest, yet enough to "take the prison'd soul, And lap it in Elysium."

For the man with the pipe held his listeners prisoned, strangers and villagers alike. Silent and motionless, they stood where

those magic notes had first fallen on their ears; the saddler, the wheelwright, the old chemist, the women with their baskets of strawberries, the grey-bearded snake-catcher leaning on his stick with his bag and adder tin, the labourer with scythe on shoulder, the group of visitors by the hotel;—all paused, forgetting the thing they were doing, oblivious of aught save that wild stream of melody flowing round them. Still the piper played, and the breeze blew the dust in white swirls about his feet. Then the wind rose and the dust rose also, till the piper was seen through it as through a pale mist. Suddenly, still playing, with amazing leapings and twirlings, piper and dust-cloud spun away together up the road and into the forest depths.

For a minute, while yet the notes of the pipe were heard, the people remained immovable, silent; then, awaking as from a dream, each one looked upon his neighbour, and turned again to the daily business of life.

"The pied piper has departed without handing round the hat," observed a tourist. "Truly a most singular piper!"

"There's two on 'em," muttered the old snake-catcher, staring after the vanishing dust-cloud.

"What! Are there two pipers?"

The old man nodded. "T'other's harmless enough, like this;" he pulled a green snake out of his bag, and the creature glided up his sleeve. "But yon," pointing to the woods, "he's like what I've got here," tapping the adder tin. "Ay, there's queer things i' the forest," he added as he moved away.

"'Pied piper'?" said another idler reflectively, "I have always pictured that troublesome musician in a garment of many colours like Jacob. Yet after all we call the magpie pied."

"Whatever his dress," rejoined the first speaker, "undoubtedly he is the piper."

"In these days?" asked the other jestingly.

"Even in these days. I might say, particularly in these days. Old beliefs, old legends have come to the surface again now and then at all times—weeds of Lethe; and the amount of ancient wreckage lately thrown up by that slow stream is surprising; living wreckage, some of it; the old gods are returning."

"The piper is a weed worth cultivating," remarked a third visitor standing in the hotel doorway, a red-haired, keen-eyed, cheerful individual; "and the snake-catcher is right, there are two pied fellows going piping about. This one I have not seen before, but the other was playing here yesterday. He looked ill, poor chap, and his piping was as melancholy as himself. Nothing like what we have just heard. The pipe was different too, it was

a flageolet. Now this last resembled the thing the pifferari play upon—sort of old Greek thing—I forget its name.”

“Monaulos,” said a tall man in clerical dress, with a strong, clever face, perhaps a little hard in expression, as the face of a priest is apt to be; a hardness, however, that might be disturbed, and to-day there was a perceptible softening of glance and manner. “Monaulos,” he repeated, “curious that it should have sung in the ears of mankind so many centuries.”

“This is its swan-song, Powell,” said the red-haired visitor, “we are going to iron the world flat into the commercial ideal. Nobody will know anything except how to switch on something or other, and dexterously to tell as many lies as the devil let fall over Syria.”

“I hope not.”

“Must be so; we shall be much too busy with our muck-rakes to think of any immortal garland. The dust of the arena not only clings to our feet, it is rising and veiling our sight, smothering our souls. There is the germ of a sermon for you, Powell. However, one miracle will happen, one that all good men have desired. The whole earth will be of one faith—Mammon-worship, mingled with that which accompanies it, a craving for ignoble power.”

“‘Mammon, the least erected spirit that fell,’” quoted Powell with a half smile.

“Of course,” replied his friend. “A suitable god for those cramped by stooping over the muck-rakes. Nobody will want to stand upright, either in body or spirit. Going to Barrow Down? Well, remember me to Mrs. Warrington. I’m off to see the abbey.”

The two departed, and one of the remaining loungers idly inquired, “Who’s the parson? I seem to know the name. Noticed him at breakfast.”

“Yes, he arrived last night,” answered another. “He’s Eldred Powell, the preacher. Sure to be a bishop by-and-by, then archbishop. The red-haired man, who gave you a beating at billiards last night, is Yates the barrister, Powell’s particular friend. He is here as best man.”

“Best man?” with lively interest.

“Just so. You recollect that tremendous smash of Black and Warrington last year? Black blew his brains out, and Warrington bolted, and was luckily drowned in the wreck of the *Marina*. Well, Powell is going to marry Warrington’s widow.”

“Oh? What is she like?”

“Don’t know. Never saw her. She is staying at Barrow

Down for the wedding next week. It is to be a quiet affair, Yates tells me. Powell preaches at Barrow to-morrow, I believe."

"I think I will go and hear him."

"Be early then. I'm told the church won't hold more than a dozen." And the speaker strolled away.

All forest roads are more or less beautiful, and the sun-dappled way to Barrow Down was fair indeed that morning. There was a sense of rejoicing life everywhere. The woods were in their fullest luxuriance, musical with rustling leaves and sweet with scents of lime-blossom and fern and ripening grass. And Eldred Powell's spirit was in harmony with the joy of the summer day. He was a dreamer who intended that his dreams should become realities. Already he had done well in the fierce fight; he would do still better in the future. His name was even now in the mouths of men; by-and-by it should not be "a," but "the" name; and when he who bore it had passed out of the battle, it should echo down the centuries as did those of the great churchmen of old. Such were his dreams; but to-day the tumult of that strife seemed far distant. His keen face softened, life was very good to him; his one impossible dream had become a reality, he was going to marry Amy Warrington. His thoughts went back to the time when she was Amy Marston, and he poor, struggling, perforce silent. Now—he checked his musings, the piper again! Yet those plaintive, hesitating notes stealing from out the woodland surely were never blown by that masterful piper whose cadences swept round like wind-driven flame?

Powell stopped a moment to listen, then went on with a frown; he remembered the air this invisible musician was playing; Dick Warrington had been fond of it, had often played it on his flageolet. Poor Dick had gone downward of his own free will; idle, extravagant: not cruel, but neglectful, absorbed in his boon companions while his wife sat alone—the one woman whom Powell had desired to marry. Then the weaving years had wrought at the web of life, and the pattern had changed; Dick slept under the Channel seas, as was best, and here was this sunny July morning, the sunny future. Powell walked more swiftly, and gradually the sighing melody died in the forest behind him; he was glad when the familiar notes no longer reached his ear.

A rise of the ground, a turn of the road, and he was in the hamlet of Barrow Down, its thatched cottages, little church, and well, clustering together within the surrounding belt of forest, cottages and church alike white with the snow of climbing roses. Nearly opposite the church was a small house with blue palings and a mulberry-tree at the gate, and here Powell was welcomed

by a fair, slender woman with a face like Signorelli's Enthroned Madonna.

"You have arrived, then?" she said, and voice and smile were sweet and radiant as the day.

"Two hours ago," he replied, "two long hours. How well you are looking! This place suits you."

"Is it not idyllic? Though I have been here so short a time years seem to have passed since I left town. One feels like a dreaming chrysalis rolled up in a green leaf, or a sleepy butterfly, so carelessly happy."

"It is time you were carelessly happy," he responded; a remark that would have considerably surprised his friends had they heard it, for Powell had the reputation of being a just but somewhat hard man, one to whom the expression "careless happiness" was as rank heresy. Indeed, he was not quite sure that anybody ought to be happy at all; if they were, it should be a sober, cautious enjoyment, not a feast of the gods, but a family dinner ordered by himself. However, Powell, like many others, was better than his opinions, and Amy Warrington could bring to light, as with a magic wand, the spring of sympathy that welled far below the seeming arid surface.

"Come and see the church where you will preach to-morrow," she went on, "it is so tiny one could almost put it in one's pocket."

"The church where we shall be married the day after to-morrow. I do not know what possessed me to say I would preach. The sermon will be either my best or my worst; probably the latter."

His companion shook her head. "Not the latter," she said, as they strolled across the road and up the churchyard path, strewn with white rose-petals blowing off the porch.

"Well, Haughton"—Haughton was the Vicar of Barrow Down—"seems to have set his heart on my preaching, so I could hardly refuse. At any rate, I shall have no difficulty in making myself heard," added Powell, glancing round. They were standing within the church.

"Does it not remind you," she asked, "of the fairy carriage and pair that went into a walnut-shell? There are no aisles, you see; only the nave, and that is very small. One hears all the outside sounds; the rustle of the leaves, and the cow-bells."

Powell was about to speak, when he became aware that somebody was looking in at them through an open window behind him. He turned suddenly, and a white slouch hat vanished below the sill.

"What is it?" Amy Warrington turned also, but there was

nothing save the white-rose clusters swinging to and fro in the wind.

"I fancied I saw a man at that window," said Powell; "a piper whom I heard at Crowhurst this morning."

"In black and white clothes?—the Pied Piper as I call him? Does he not play wonderfully? The villagers are quite superstitious about him; they think his playing witchcraft. Of course I hear the news of the forest, at least of Barrow Down. The women gossip at the well, just as they did in old times; and I have made friends with them that I may go and gossip too. They are quite pleased to see me."

"Who would not be pleased to see you?"

She laughed softly; everything about her was soft and gentle, almost subdued, yet with a sense of reviving life as of a rain-beaten flower expanding again to the sunshine.

"The people tell me there are two pipers," she resumed, "exactly like each other, one who takes money and one who does not. I have only seen the one who does not, he never stops for it. Perhaps they are brothers, or perhaps the people are mistaken in imagining there are two."

"Mistakes are easily made concerning these human grasshoppers," replied Powell. "They disappear when the sun no longer warms. I wonder where they go? If we searched a hollow tree in winter, should we find a piper asleep in it? But if you smiled like that, Amy, he would wake up, thinking summer had come. Now show me the gossiping well, I want to see the whole of Barrow Down."

He had spoken jestingly, but he felt a vague, unreasoning dislike to the idea of the two pipers. The memory of both recurred to him at intervals during the day, always with an indefinable uneasiness, a slight chill of the backbone, which he told himself was sheer nonsense and rank superstition as absurd as the village gossip of witchcraft. What if ten or a dozen such fellows were wandering in the forest? Yet there had been something uncanny about that fantastically leaping piper in the dust-cloud, something that caused a faint stirring at the roots of one's hair, and which, Powell told himself, was of course a ridiculous delusion. Nevertheless, a certain discomfort of thought connected with the pied musician went with him when he returned to his hotel, waited on him during dinner, and mingled with his dreams.

Sunday was another day of clear heat and summer glory. A little wind went to and fro in the forest, and the sound of church bells went with it, bringing many strangers to Barrow Down; for the visitors at the Crowhurst hotels felt that to hear a celebrated

preacher in this place of fair quiet was like the pepper in the cream tart of Arabian story ; therefore the tiny church was filled even to the crowding of the rose-shadowed porch. In the brief pause ere he began, Powell looked down on the upturned faces—one or two of them well-known in the great world—and his soul swelled with satisfaction ; here was an audience able to appreciate him, able to criticise, and he did not fear criticism. He meant to give his best ; a sermon carefully considered, brilliantly written ; the discourse of a clever man which was exceedingly like the discourses of other clever men. This was what the congregation expected, and as the opening sentences fell upon their ears, they settled themselves to listen with an air of serene content.

Without, the forest sang its mighty undersong, a vast murmur that rose and fell like a distant surge ; while at the windows blossom and leaf rustled softly as the warm wind blew over them. Eight, ten minutes passed ; Powell was in full swing and thoroughly satisfying both himself and his listeners, when above that murmuring voice of the woodland rose a ripple of melody, like summer rain among the leaves. Faint and far away at first, slowly increasing in volume, drawing nearer, nearer, the weird music of the pied piper.

Powell stopped as suddenly as a lassoed steed ; he lost the thread of his sermon, knew also that he had lost the rapt attention which he had commanded a moment before. The piper entangled preacher and congregation alike in his marvellous net of sound. The check, however, was but momentary to Powell, he gathered up his scattered thoughts and went doggedly on. Yet he was conscious that he no longer held the minds of those he addressed ; and the rain of melody became a rushing river of music, a falling of waters. Then into his memory flashed that old tale of Thessaly, of the pouring fountains that were human lives wasting—so many human lives ! The piteousness of it all ! And casting aside everything he had intended to say, Powell spoke as he had never spoken before and perhaps never would again ; preaching as the piper played, feeling in unison with that sweeping flood of harmony.

He regained mastery over his audience ; their minds were his to sway as he wished. How long he was thus speaking he did not know, neither did those who heard ; but the actual time was short. He ceased as suddenly as he had begun, and the music without ceased also, as the last word left his lips, the swift silence coming almost as a shock. During a full minute no one stirred ; then a sigh breathed through the church as though all were awaking from a dream, and Powell gave the benediction.

The congregation slowly streamed out into the sunshine, talking in low tones.

"He is even better than I anticipated," said a thin, dark man with keen eyes, "much better! Extraordinarily eloquent!"

"Yes," agreed the friend addressed, "and did you hear the piper? What with the fellow without and the fellow within, I feel as though I had been bewitched."

"Extraordinarily eloquent!" repeated the other thoughtfully.

That day Powell dined with the vicar of Barrow Down. Later, standing with Amy Warrington under the mulberry tree by the gate, he mentioned the piper.

"It is best to be simple," he said. "The piper has taught me something. The whole place has taught me something. You are right in all you say of it. I begin to perceive the need of the desert. One might learn a great deal here."

"I hoped you would like it," she responded. "When we are white-haired and very old, we might live here, and forget our elderly aches and pains. Nothing seems to matter in the forest, earth and sky are so soothing. Have you noticed that all the sounds are pleasant? Think how much that means. There is no noise whatever, only musical sound. I am beginning to realise how we needlessly torment ourselves by living in the monotony of towns, and refusing the natural consolations offered to us. Here everything changes from hour to hour. Look at the poppies closing their petals now that the sunset is dying; they fold them like hands in prayer. There is a glow-worm; do you see it?"

"I see nothing but you," said Powell, and a smile flickered over her face.

"Another thing I have learnt," she resumed, "the infinite variety in the lights of God. That moon just rising behind the trees is not the same as yesterday, nor will it be the same to-morrow, and it casts different shadows. The lights we make are always the same; but moonlight, starlight, sunlight, daylight; the dawns and sunsets, all vary continually. I seemed to have gained new eyes in these few weeks."

"Help me to see too. There are many things I could perceive more clearly through your eyes."

The moon rose above the forest as Powell walked back to Crowhurst along the white road, barred and chequered by moving shadows of bush and tree. The night was fragrant and still; only the faintest breeze rustled the leaves and shook the perfume from lime-blossom and wild-flower. He had gone rather more than half a mile, when from out the moon-flecked gloom on his right came a whisper of music, sweet, vibrating—the piper

again. The whisper grew, became an exquisite maze of harmonies soft as the wind in the leaves, delicate as the shadows and sparkling as the dew ; yet with a strange quality of insistence, a calling, as it were, alluring, irresistible.

Powell stopped a moment to listen, then turned aside into the dusky labyrinth of the woodland ; he would speak with this wondrous piper ; so he followed that music with quiet unhurrying step as in a dream. He did not hasten to overtake the player, he was not sure after all that he wished to meet him face to face ; but he desired to hear once more those singing rushing waves of melody that had so stirred his spirit in the church at Barrow Down. Apparently the musician retreated as Powell advanced, for the same distance seemed always between them. Still he walked on, hardly conscious of thought, surrendering himself to the magic of the night and the spell of that strange piping that drew him through the white sheen and olive-black shadows of the moonlit forest.

And how varied were those shadows ! He noticed them, as he passed onward ; no two alike, a million fantastic shapes thrown across his path, meeting him, thronging round him, behind him. In the gloom, a ray of moonlight fell on something shining, silvery, a lustrous fretwork of grey crystal on the trunk of a fallen tree. It was but dew-drenched lichen, yet it looked like lattice-work carved by the fairies. As Powell drew near the fallen trunk, the glistening fretwork vanished, there remained but a pale blur on the dark bark. The glimmering fairy lattice was visible from one point only, where the moonbeams fell on it aslant and lit the dew entangled in its meshes. Such evanescent loveliness !—and unseen ; perhaps never to reappear ; needing the hour, the especial conditions of air and light. For whose pleasure was it and all other beauty created ? Why should the monstrous egotism of man imagine anything unseen because he does not see it ?

Familiar words rose dimly in Powell's mind ; "And behold, it was very good." Yes, that was it, "very good," and he had not much observed the world's beauty, he had been too busy. Was it a sin to be too busy to stand humbly before the works of the Great Artist ? Perhaps to admire was a duty ; to ignore, ingratitude ? Had he been ungrateful ?

A winged shadow flitted before him, crossing a moonbeam and so visible, then lost in the darkness ; only a grey night-moth, a marvellous little life. And the forest was full of these marvellous little lives ! Here, at his feet, were jewels that surely Titania had dropped, tiny lights gleaming from the short herbage ;

jewels? no, glow-worms; little lives again. Nay, the woods themselves were alive! He was walking in a living world, not the dead one of houses built by man, but the world-home not made with hands. The forest scents floated round him as he walked on; here a gush of lime-blossom, there the breath of grass and fern, followed by the faint fragrance of the wild rose. All this!—and the deep, soft gloom, the phantasmal beauty of the shadows, the white lustre of the moon—Powell stood still, the piper had ceased playing. That wonderful music no longer rippled through the forest, only the churring of the fern-owls and the rustle of the wind in the trees broke the silence of the night.

The sudden stillness aroused Powell as from a vision. Where was he? How far from Crowhurst? He had not the slightest idea in what direction he had wandered, nor did he know the hour. He was standing in an open grassy space; high in the blue moon-flooded heaven the dragon coiled and sparkled, and Boötes swung slowly westward, with Arcturus glittering through the moonshine as through white mist.

“Fled is that music—do I wake or sleep?” murmured Powell.

Then he looked up, “Past eleven,” he said, forgetting his watch. He had wandered far indeed, back almost to the morning of the world, and the star-dials sufficed him. He turned to retrace his steps, star-guided, when he saw on the left a charcoal-burner’s hut; one of those shelters of turf laid on poles that men have not yet lost the art of making, and resembling a giant fir-cone set on end. There was evidently someone within, for the yellow gleam of a candle shone from the half-open door. Whoever might be the inmate, he would know the nearest way back to Crowhurst, thought Powell, as he went, moth-like, to the candle flame. The dusky interior of the little wood dwelling was comfortable enough. There was the usual square of four bricks to put fire upon; a coffee-pot stood in the ashes. On a rough bench serving as a table were a cup, a jug of water, the candle, and one or two medicine bottles. Beside the bench was a wooden box; the remaining wall-space being occupied by a primitive bed which was merely a solid block of wood, not more than a foot high, and covered with a horse-cloth. On this, his head pillowed on a rolled-up coat, his face turned towards the wall, lay the pied piper.

For a moment Powell felt extreme astonishment; then he asked himself why he should be surprised. This woodland hut accounted for the sudden cessation of the music; the piper had simply stopped playing and walked in here.

“Who is it?” he asked feebly, not changing his position.

“Pardon me,” began Powell, standing at the open door. “I

have lost my way. Can you direct me"—his voice died, for the man in the piper's dress turned his head and the light of the candle fell full on his face—the face of Richard Warrington, who had been drowned in the wreck of the *Marina*.

"What!" he ejaculated, raising himself on his elbow, "is it you, Powell? What brought you here? Come in and sit down."

But the shock had been so great that the other felt powerless to move.

"Come in," repeated Warrington fretfully. "Can't you see I am ill—dying? Sit down on that box, and let me think a little."

Powell obeyed mechanically. Was he dreaming? Surely he must be; and yet he knew himself awake.

"Now, tell me what brought you here?"

"I do not know. I mean, it was purely accidental. I followed some music and lost my way."

"That confounded piper, my double? I believe he is the devil, or a particular friend of the devil's. Perhaps I ought to say I am his double, rather than he mine. I found him here when I came, and thought it would be a good idea to dress like him; two alike make more impression on people's minds. Not that they ever mistook my playing for his!" Here Warrington laughed; adding, "Have you ever seen his face?"

"No, he was playing in clouds of dust the only time I saw him, and wore his hat drawn low." Powell spoke almost unconsciously, he hardly knew what he was saying; his mind was in the utmost confusion.

"Exactly. That is one of the queer things about him. No one ever sees his face. There is always the dust or the distance, the hat or the trees, or something or other that is in the way. He is the devil of Tartini's dream, though perhaps he plays too well to be a devil. They never do anything well except mischief-making. But our piper excels in that, he led you here."

Dick Warrington paused, and a silence of some minutes ensued. Powell sat with unseeing eyes fixed on the half-open door, where the white moonlight lay on the threshold and made the grass look hoary. He could not realise this monstrous happening, this dead man alive. His whole spirit was in a tumult of revolt; he sat striving to master the whirling chaos within him. The flame of the candle flickered unsteadily as the night breeze wandered in, the churring of a fern-owl sounded near, then there was stillness again, save for the ceaseless murmur of the forest, which seemed to deepen the silence in the hut. At last he spoke.

"You were saved, then?" he said dully.

"Obviously. I was picked up by a fishing-boat, and the idea

came into my head of giving a false name and becoming a conveniently dead man. So I told the fishing-folk I was Peter Smith, and asked them to put me ashore on the Cornish coast. I knew Amy had friends who would look after her; at least, I hoped so, and really my dying seemed an excellent notion. What else could I do? I was stone-broke, you know; and I was going over to Guernsey to try if an old acquaintance there could give me a lift of any sort. I assure you I had not the least idea my partner was such a rascal. I left everything to his management, and thought he was feathering both our nests very nicely. I never imagined he was doing it with the clients' money. So, when the smash came, I hurried off, as I didn't exactly know what I had been let in for. I thought my Guernsey friend could tell me, and possibly assist. Well, I landed in Cornwall and got work on a farm. The farmer was a decent chap, and I stayed there till this spring, when I bought an oboe—I could play it, you know—and started life again as a musical tramp. The fact was I could no longer work. A chill I got in the wreck had stuck to me somehow, and—you see the result. Gradually I drifted here, imitated the piper's dress—I couldn't imitate his music!—and that's all. Putting it baldly, I stole, or permitted Black to steal for me; then I ran away; and have been hiding ever since."

Powell made no comment. After a moment's pause, the other resumed.

"Now that I can see the end coming, I can also see what a fool I have been all along. But that's always the way. No use talking about it. I'm very comfortable here. The charcoal-burner permits me to use the hut for the merest trifle; and I have a doctor and a parson—not the parson of Barrow Down who is going to marry you and Amy to-morrow; mine belongs to South Beeches, a mile from here. By the way, do you know you are a good eight miles from Crowhurst, and nearly ten from Barrow. Of course, to my parson and doctor, and everyone else, I am Peter Smith. In fact, I *am* Peter Smith, Dick Warrington died a year ago; and Peter Smith is dying too; my doctor says so. Better give me some of that stuff of his in the bottle there. It picks me up for a minute or two: I am talking a good deal, and I shall not last out the night."

Powell gave the medicine in silence; he did not in the least believe Warrington was in any immediate danger, and he could not yet trust himself to speak. Despite his priestly training, his whole soul seethed with fury.

"Thanks. In my wanderings about the forest," Dick continued, "I naturally heard all the gossip, and latterly it has interested

me very much. At first I was rather taken aback when I heard that Amy was at Barrow and going to marry you; but on reflection I perceived what an excellent arrangement it was. It is a great solace to me to leave my wife in such good hands."

The levity of this exasperated Powell. "If you were not ill——" he began.

"Yes, I understand," responded Warrington, with a glance of mocking amusement, "you would give me a thrashing; just as you did when we were at school together, and I lied about something—I forget what. How long ago it seems! Well, never mind, you can't do it now, and I wish you to listen. You may give me some more of that physis by-and-by in lieu of the thrashing; it's much worse! I heard, as I have said, all the news, and took care to keep out of the way. I had had a scare at Crowhurst when I went to pipe to the tourists and saw Yates there. He did not recognise me, but I got a fright. However, I could not resist taking a peep at you and Amy in the church at Barrow yesterday.

"Then it was you whom I saw outside a window?"

"Yes; I dodged below the sill when you turned your head. That was my last outing, I got a lift back in a cart. To-day you have heard the real piper; he has the field to himself now. I retire before my rival—before both my rivals."

"If you have nothing more to say than this sort of thing——"

"But I have!" interrupted the other. "I've lots to say, and it's worth listening to. Balaam was no good, yet he could see clearly enough; he was a true prophet. Bear that in mind, regard me as Balaam, and attend. I shall not live till morning. You do not believe that, nevertheless it is the truth; therefore your marriage must take place as arranged; that is, to-morrow. Wait!" as Powell opened his mouth to speak, "I know all you would say, and it is mere conventional rubbish. And don't look so freezingly indignant, one would think I was asking you to commit bigamy. There is no fear of that, I shall go out before sunrise."

"The question does not appear to me to admit of discussion."

"Oh, doesn't it, though! Of course if you were as sensible as I am there would be no discussion. As you are not, argument is necessary. You are now resolved to be the usual high-minded nuisance; to proclaim the erroneous date of my first demise, and the annoying date of my second; to delay your marriage for—say six months or a year; set people's tongues wagging delightedly—they would probably say you and Amy knew I was living, but somebody else found it out; your bishop would hear that and be scandalised, and doubtful of you. All this you would bear with an uplifted feeling of martyrdom and conscious excellence. Yet, as

the time of waiting passed on—and it would pass slowly—you would begin to reflect that for the sake of your career it might be wiser not to marry Amy."

His listener made a swift gesture of negation. Warrington smiled and continued.

"Yes, you would, and your hesitation would urge you on. Because you did not wish to forsake her, you would do so. You would esteem it a duty to your bishop and the church, for if you remained celibate people would pity and regard you as a saintly martyr, having escaped the toils of a designing woman who would have led you into bigamy if luck had not befriended you. Your fame would go up by leaps and bounds. Am I not right? Have I not touched Achilles' heel?"

"I humbly trust I should not be so basely mean."

"You trust, yes; but you are not sure, you cannot say that you are sure, because in your soul you feel I may be right. Moreover, you would not feel base, you would so thoroughly enjoy doing violence to your own feelings; the hair shirt would be one of your own choosing—your own making. Now I offer you a hair shirt that will worry nobody but yourself; that, in short, will be a garment of righteousness to you if you accept it meekly." He paused, a gleam of good-humoured malice in his eyes, and Powell stirred impatiently.

"Yes, I know," resumed Dick, "I am worse than the hair shirt. Still, I am right; there is the point. I am undoubtedly right. Your hair shirt fits your own spiritual vanity and harasses other people. The one I am advising fits everything except your spiritual vanity, and a little sand-papery of that would really be an improvement. You are a good fellow, but you have a tendency towards arrogance; the jingle of St. Peter's keys, you know. Now the cause of your reluctance to agree with me respecting this matter of the marriage is that you are afraid of the date of my demise coming out some day. You fear people saying, 'Powell married the widow the day after her husband's death.' You need not fear; the secret will never be known unless you reveal it; and the consciousness of the circumstances of my departure will be just the hair shirt needed. Your sense of social propriety is too strong. I am aware it is open to you to retort that my sense of social propriety has always been too weak; both statements are correct; and if you persist in your crooked notions, your strictness will prove as disastrous to Amy's happiness as my laxity. I did not behave altogether well to her, therefore I am trying to do what I can to smooth her future. But you who profess to despise the world are ready to spoil her life for fear of what the world might

say! It will never say anything, because it will never have anything to say unless you go shouting to it to come and look at me. There will be nothing to hinder your marriage to-morrow, I am going fast."

Warrington stopped speaking, and there was a short silence. The night breeze sighed through the forest, a long, deep suspiration that, coming from afar, swelled softly upon the ear, filling all the air, drew near like an invisible presence, passed and died in the distance.

"Curious that, is it not?" said the sick man, "that sort of wind passing like a vast bird. What does Raleigh say?—'The wings of man's life are plumed with the feathers of death.' I've noticed all sorts of odd things since I have been wandering about here. It has been a return to Mother Earth, and a wonderful old dame she is."

Powell turned and looked at his companion. "Are you not talking too much?" he asked in a more friendly tone.

"Too much for my health or for your satisfaction? Don't trouble about me. I have not much time left, and if I am to say anything I must say it now. Hullo! there is my double again. Now what do you suppose he is playing, a dirge? There is the sound of a going in it. Hear the 'Ave atque vale!' Considerate of him, is it not? An act of courtesy to his poor double."

As the strange wailing music rose in the forest, Powell felt a sense of startled uneasiness. Perhaps too, the woodland spells were working, those spells of serenity, of repose, of feeling softened by the peace of the forest as the air is softened by the leaves, for it was in a gentle compassionate voice that he said,

"Do you think you are worse? Where is your doctor? Let me fetch him."

"Certainly not!" Dick positively laughed. "Peter Smith is no concern of yours, and you are not to appear in connection with him. I'm no worse than I was when you came. My doctor was here this afternoon, and he will be here again to-morrow, also the parson. What more do you want? And the charcoal-burner—a decent fellow—turns up at six. Just sit and think things out while I listen to my piper who 'makes such delicate music in the woods.' Look at the situation as though you were advising—not yourself, but a friend; deny yourself the joy of martyrdom; put the priest aside and treat the matter as a man. Remember I am known only to strangers, and my name is Peter Smith. I die to-morrow, nay, to-day, for I see it is past midnight; the moon is sinking, going with the piper's dirge; and I am going too."

"If you would but let me fetch——"

"Nonsense! Besides, you could not find the way unless I described it, which I shall not do. I am only tired. I will sleep a little while you think over what I have said. I'll talk about it again presently."

He turned over and seemed to sink into slumber. Without, that strange melody still wailed through the forest, but more softly, muffled as it were; the white moonlight moved away from the door as the moon sank lower; and Powell sat immovable, thinking—thinking. Yet more softly the piper piped, was he going? Powell bent over the sleeper, Dick was breathing quietly. The moon sank, and without was the starlit darkness and the faint rustle of the leaves, the piper was gone! Still Powell sat thinking. He did not believe that Warrington would die so soon; but if he did? Was he right? Was silence right?

And still Powell sat motionless, while Warrington slept and the world swung round till Arcturus dipped beneath the earth-rim and the Pleiades rose over the eastern horizon. Then came the indefinable stir that heralds the dawn. A wind stole through the forest, not the long sigh of deepest night, but the waking wind, the forerunner of the sun. A few birds twittered; slowly the black masses of foliage paled, then took form and colour. The dawn wind returned, this time stronger; the shadows changed, as the pearl-grey light glimmered in the east. The candle flickered, went out; there was no need of it in the growing radiance—not grey now, but blue.

Powell rose to his feet with a little shiver, and a vague idea of making a fire lest the sleeper should need anything when he awoke. Surely Dick was very still! Something in the attitude of the motionless figure struck Powell, and he bent over the rough bed. The pale clear light fell full on Warrington's face, and his old friend drew back; the wanderer had been right, he had departed before sunrise.

Hardly knowing what he did, Powell went out of the hut into the exquisite freshness of the dawn, and the risen sun sent a shaft of gold across the dewy grass to his feet. He walked on a little way, trying to collect his thoughts. All round him was the awakened woodland, rejoicing in the glory of the new day, he himself the only unhappy thing, a blot on that fair peace. Presently he came to a cottage, where a woman was milking cows. It was no matter of surprise to her that gentlefolk should be abroad at that hour. She merely supposed him to be a restless tourist or insatiate butterfly-destroyer, and supplied him with the milk he desired and a slice of bread. Powell ate this meal sitting on a bank opposite the cottage; then bidding farewell to the

milker, he took his way back as he thought to the hut. But he could not find the open glade where stood the odd little dwelling. No matter, he would return to the cottage and inquire; there could not be many such huts in the forest, the woman would be able to tell him.

Woodland ways are confusing; Powell tried first one white road, then another, yet he failed to find a cottage. After walking for nearly an hour, he came upon a fallen tree, and sat down. The food had calmed him, that and the dawn miracle, his mind was clear and quiet. Here in this radiant morning the past night seemed unreal, incredible. Had he sat in that hut?—talked with a man believed dead a year ago?—seen him die? Or was it all a shadowy horror before dawn?—an evil dream to be forgotten? Here was the fresh beauty of the summer day, and at Barrow Down the wind would be blowing the white rose petals, and Amy would be waking to her wedding morning while he was on his way to darken her happiness with the risen ghost of past grief—with a memory of present pain that would be as a cloud throughout her life.

There was pain enough in the world, was he bound to cause more? Almost the past night seemed to him a vision; would it be wiser, better to let it remain a vision, seen only by himself? Had he not followed the piper? Why did he? Powell was as free from superstition as any man, but when he recalled the spell of that weird piping—well, he drove it from his mind, he could not solve the mystery. An evil weed of Lethe truly, for that uncanny music had led him to that other weed of Lethe. Once more the question presented itself; that poor weed had but risen for a moment, to sink again beneath the waves of oblivion; must he speak of that brief rising? Silence would hurt no one. Powell rose to his feet.

“Whether I am right or wrong I cannot tell,” he said aloud, “but I will be silent.”

He took the first road he could find, and presently met a labourer who directed him to Crowhurst. “It was about five miles off,” the man said. As Powell walked on a familiar voice hailed him, and to his astonishment he saw Yates advancing from a side path.

“Oh, here you are!” ejaculated the barrister. “That’s right! I’m thankful to see a human being, particularly yourself. Where are we? Does this road lead to Crowhurst? Powell, I’ve spent the night in the forest. I lost my way!”

“So did I.”

“Did you? Well, it happened thus. I started for Barrow

Down after dinner, thinking I should meet you, but met the old snake-catcher instead, who told me he had seen you following that mysterious piper; and as there is something uncommonly odd about that pidd fellow, I thought I had better follow too. It is such a slur on the best man if he loses the bridegroom!"

"Did you hear the piper?"

"The music?—yes, and went after it like a boy after a butterfly. It led me through the woods for what seemed hours, then suddenly stopped close by a church with an inviting porch. There, the piping having ceased, I sat down to rest and fell asleep, praising the charity of our forefathers who built porches to churches. When I awoke it was broad day, but nobody about. I suppose there must have been a village near, but I didn't see it. I set out to find a guide and rambled here. Most extraordinary night! The piper is either the devil or Pan in disguise, else how could he drag us both about the place like that? However, it does not matter, since all's well."

"Yes," replied Powell, "all's well."

C. L. ANTROBUS.



The Night between the Saints and the Souls.

"So you've been tramping in the Highlands ever since April?"

"Yes. You see I'm never likely to have another chance. A Canadian country doctor has neither the time nor the money to come over to Scotland very often, and once I settle down as my father's assistant I shall be kept hard at work for many a day."

"And you're not tired of your wanderings?"

"Tired! I hope to go on till December, then I must go home."

"Well, if you do go to Balmoral you might do worse than come back by the bridle-path from Braemar to Blair Atholl. It takes you thirty miles through the heart of the hills, and there's a shepherd's hut about half-way where you can spend the night."

"Thank you, I'll remember."

"And when you're in Blair I hope you'll spend a few days with me. We're connected, you know, and I can introduce you to some of your mother's people."

"I'll come with pleasure, Mr. Stuart."

"And you'll let me know when you're coming. You have my address? Duncan Stuart—wait, I'll give you my card. Now I must be going. I'm glad to have met you, and I hope you'll have a pleasant time."

And a very pleasant time I had. It was the last day of October when I reached Balmoral. I passed the night at Braemar, and set out for Blair Atholl next morning. The shepherd's hut proved to be not quite half-way, and I started on my second day's tramp with seventeen miles to go. I had overslept myself, and it was past ten o'clock before I "took the road," on a clear bright day with the low winter sun shining on the hill-side, brown with dead heather and yellow with dying bracken. I got over the first few miles in fine style, then suddenly my foot caught on a stone and I fell full-length on the ground. I got up wondering what had made me so clumsy, but the first step I

took revealed the cause of my woes. The sole of my right boot was half off.

That sole behaved as if it had been possessed of the devil. It flapped at every step, it doubled up suddenly, it turned round and wrenched my ankle. At last I took off my boots and walked barefoot—and in half-an-hour my feet were bruised and bleeding.

Darkness came on while I was still some miles from Blair Atholl. The moon was up and the sky was full of drifting clouds. There was not a soul to be seen, not a sound to be heard but the rustle of the wind in the dry heather, or the cry of a startled bird.

At last, oh joy! I saw a light gleaming down near the river. Leaving the path I scrambled down the steep hill-side, and soon caught sight of other lights a little further off, but all pretty close together. It seemed to be a small village.

In the doorway of the nearest house stood one of the prettiest girls I have ever seen—tall and dark, with rosy cheeks, blue eyes and clear-cut features. She was dressed in petticoat and short-gown, and her feet were bare.

I took off my hat.

"Good evening, sir," she said in Gaelic.

In the course of my wanderings I had set myself to pick up as much Gaelic as possible, and though my speech was halting I could generally make myself understood.

"Good evening," I answered. "Can you tell me whether there is an inn hereabouts, or any place where I can get a carriage?"

"No," she said, "there is no inn; but come in and sit by our fire, the night is dark and you might lose your way on the moor."

She stood aside; I saw the interior of the house, and a miserable hovel it was. The floor was earthen, the tiny window was unglazed, a hole in the roof did duty for a chimney, and the walls were festooned with soot. But a bright fire burned on the hearth and the inhabitants looked well-fed and comfortable.

There were four people in the room, a middle-aged man in a kilt, a woman who seemed to be his wife, an old granny crouching over the fire, and a young man, evidently English, in a shooting jacket and knickerbockers. The middle-aged man came forward.

"You are welcome, sir," he said, "for to-night at least we can offer you food and shelter."

It was getting late and I knew Mr. Stuart would be expecting me, but I was tired, lame, and cold, and the prospect of a rest beside the fire was tempting, so I thanked him and went in. All the house doors seemed to be standing open, and a number of

young people were coming and going, talking merrily in Gaelic. I could not understand half they said, but I gathered that the girl's name was Mary, and that she was a general favourite.

"Come in to the fire," said the middle-aged woman.

There was a log beside the fire, apparently a piece of driftwood cast up in a recent spate; I sat down on it and stretched out my feet to the blaze. But I was chilled through and through, and bright though the fire was I could not get the cold out of my bones.

"You are tired?" said the woman.

"Yes," I said, "I was very glad to see the light from your door. I was beginning to think there wasn't a house in the whole of Glen Tilt."

"It is not often you will see lights in the Glen," said she.

"Oftener than you care to, maybe," muttered a voice beside me in English.

I looked towards the young Englishman, but he was staring into the fire and did not seem to be aware of my existence.

"It is a very lonely glen," I said, "as desolate as some of the out-of-the-way parts of Canada."

A young man who had been chatting with Mary at the door came in and began talking to her mother. I drew nearer to the fire. The wind seemed to blow through every cranny of the roughly-built walls. I could not have been colder on the bare hillside. I held my hands close to the red glow of the peats, but there seemed to be no heat in them. The young Englishman watched me with an expression of malicious amusement.

"So you're from Canada?" he said.

"Yes," I answered. "I came over to see the old country before settling down. But I'll soon need to be going home now."

"Oh," he said, "you mean to go home, do you? Well, I meant to go home, too."

"And why don't you?" I asked bluntly, for he spoke with unmistakable regret.

"She keeps me," he said, nodding towards the girl.

I looked at Mary. She was very pretty, certainly, but I could not think that a girl so utterly uncultivated was suited to the Englishman, who seemed to be a man of some position. His clothes were well cut, his hands had never done a day's work, and there was a crest on his signet-ring.

"She's a pretty girl," he said.

"Very," I replied.

"Nice lips to kiss," he went on.

I stared.

"It's Hallowe'en," he continued, "there will be all sorts of fun by-and-by. It's easy enough to snatch a kiss in a dark corner. I did it—once."

"The remembrance does not seem to give you much pleasure," said I.

"That was on Hallowe'en, too," he said; "though Hallowe'en seems a strange name for a time so little hallowed."

I was young and pedantic.

"It's the night between All Saints' day—All Hallows, you know—and All Souls' day. The vigil——"

But the young Englishman went on unheeding.

"Stolen waters are sweet—that's Solomon, isn't it? I wonder ——" There was a noise outside, the cry of some creature surprised by a fox or a weasel. I looked up quickly, and for a moment I thought I saw, not the fire-lit room, but the moon shining on the bare hillside. The old grandmother's voice recalled me to my surroundings.

"You do not know the Glen?"

"No," I answered; "I've never been in this part of the world before. But I've heard of it often enough. My mother's father had a farm near Blair Atholl, but he quarrelled with one of the Duke's keepers, and from that time everything went wrong. They were always finding fault with him for something or other, and when his lease was out the Duke wouldn't renew. So grandfather emigrated."

"I daresay he was better off in Canada," said the Englishman.

"He didn't think so," I replied. "Like most Highlanders, he thought more of his hills than of all the world besides. And since I've been in Scotland I understand the feeling."

"Ah, you have Highland blood in your veins!" said the old woman with approbation.

There was a heap of peats on the floor beside her, and she put on a couple. The fire blazed brightly. The laughter among the young folks at the door grew louder. I turned to see what was going on. One of the girls seemed to be looking on the floor for something she had lost. I saw a crooked sixpence on the ground beside me and stooped to pick it up, saying: "Is this what——"

Then I started up. Although I was sitting in the full blaze of the fire no shadow lay at my feet. The young Englishman looked at me with a mocking smile.

"Come," he said; "aren't you going to share the fun? You've no idea what fun it is."

"Leave this place," said the old woman earnestly. "Go away

quickly. It is not safe for the living to dwell among the dead."

But I stood staring stupidly at the fire-lit floor on which no shadow fell. Then there flashed into my mind a passage from an old Saga: "And they two stood beside Gunnar's cairn—and they thought they saw the cairn open, and lo! Gunnar had turned himself in the cairn and was looking at the moon. And they thought they saw four great lights in the cairn and not one of them cast a shadow."

One of the girls came forward and held out her hand.

"Aren't you coming?" she said.

A sudden terror seized me. I rushed out of the house, past the laughing group at the door, and scrambled up the hill as fast as I could, regardless of bleeding feet and stiffening bruises. I reached the path, and almost immediately ran against a man.

"What's your hurry?" said the welcome voice of Mr. Duncan Stuart.

"You, Mr. Stuart!" I gasped.

"Ay, me. I thought I'd come a bit of the way to meet you, but I expected to fall in with you long before this. What were you running at such a rate for?"

I hesitated. In presence of a comfortable, everyday person like Mr. Stuart my terror seemed absurd. And yet——

"What's that?" he said sharply.

I turned and saw the young Englishman. The next moment a drifting cloud hid the moon.

"Curious how deceptive moonlight is," said Mr. Stuart. "Just for an instant I thought that lad was young Crosby. A friend of yours, I suppose?"

"No," I said, "I never saw him till a few minutes ago at the clachan."

"Clachan! What clachan?"

"There, where the lights are, just below the rock."

Mr. Stuart came a few steps forward.

"There *are* lights," he said, in a tone of astonishment. "Oh, of course! a gipsy encampment."

"I don't think they're gipsies," said I, "they seem more like crofters."

He stood a minute watching the light. The young Englishman had disappeared.

"My lad," he said, gravely, "there are no crofters here. Duke John took care of that. Will you come with me and see what these are?"

At the thought of going back to the clachan my fears returned.

But I was ashamed to confess them, so I said boldly: "Certainly. Why not?"

Down the hill we went till we stood in front of the cluster of houses. The fire-light streamed from the open door, the lads and lassies were standing in groups laughing and jesting. Here and there a couple had stolen away into the darkness between the cottages. Facing us, a little apart from the rest, stood the young Englishman.

"God be about us all this night!" said Mr. Stuart, solemnly.

In a moment the lights were gone, the laughter was hushed, and we stood alone on the bare hillside with the wind whistling in our ears and a log of driftwood at our feet. Without another word Mr. Stuart climbed back to the path. I kept close to him but it was not till we had gone a mile or more that he spoke again.

"Man," he said, "we've seen what living eyes ought not to see. I never believed it. I've heard of it before, but I never believed it."

"What was it, then?" I asked.

"Glen Tilt used to be full of crofters, but Duke John—that was the Duke of Atholl—took it into his head they spoiled the game, so he warned them out. The poor creatures couldn't believe he would turn them off the land that had been theirs from father to son for generations, so though they were warned out they didn't go. Then the Duke sent his men to take the roofs off the houses and burn them; and the crofters, their wives, and bairns, had to shift for themselves as best they could. Yon's one of the villages that were burned, and that's where young Crosby was found dead."

"Who was young Crosby?"

"An English lad that was here three years ago. He'd got into some scrape at Oxford and been sent away for a year. He went home for a while but he did no good there, just played himself, so his father sent him here with a tutor, saying maybe he would study in a place where there was absolutely nothing else to do. He came here in May month, but as for studying—the only thing he ever learnt was Gaelic enough to tell the lasses they were bonny, and that to my thinking, he'd have been better without. He was terrible for the lasses, not that he meant any ill, but just he couldn't see a girl but he must be after her."

"But didn't the tutor——"

"The tutor could do nothing with him. In August some cousins of his came to the neighbourhood; they had a moor near

here and were always inviting him, and when they left they said he was to take a day's shooting whenever he liked. Well, this day three years he went out with his gun, saying he would shoot as long as he could see, and then he was going to smoke a pipe with an old shepherd that knew more about beasts and birds than any other man in the countryside. He never came back."

"He met with an accident?"

"No one knows. When he hadn't come back by next morning the tutor went to the old shepherd's house, but Crosby had never been there. Then a party of men went out to search, but we could get neither tale nor tidings of him till the tutor offered a reward. Then a tinker body came forward and said he'd been out late the night before—poaching, likely, but we didn't inquire too closely—and had met our man going up Glen Tilt with a lassie: he hadn't recognised the lassie, but he was sure of Crosby for he knew the English voice. We scarcely believed him, for it was miles out of the lad's way, but of course once you lose yourself on the moors you may go far enough astray. So we searched Glen Tilt and at last we found him, lying dead among the heaps of stones that used to be the cottar houses."

"What did he die of?"

Mr. Stuart shook his head.

"The doctor said 'Failure of the heart's action,' which is what doctors always do say when a death is absolutely unaccountable. But he told me privately that he couldn't understand it, for the lad was as sound as a bell and as strong as a bullock: half-a-dozen nights on the moor shouldn't have hurt him, especially in such mild weather as we had that year. I wonder now whether he fell in with—those folks we saw to-night?"

I had little doubt of it; and it seemed to me he had paid dear for the kiss he stole on that—

"Night between the sancts and the sauls
When the bodiless gang about."

E. McOWAN.

The Legend of Westry Court.

(Although I do not claim to account for the following incidents by supernatural agency, yet so odd a series of coincidences seems to me not unworthy of record.—DAHLIA CARYLL.)

"THERE, that's the picture," said Roger to me. "And now I'll explain it all to you, Cousin Dahlia." He pushed away the intervening chairs, vaulted over a table and stood right up against the big full-length portrait of two people which hung just opposite to where I was sitting. We were in the hall having tea—General and Mrs. Caryll, Roger and myself. It was January, and I had only just arrived on my visit to the Priory and my cousins. "Father, you must please supply the facts when my imagination gives out, and mother the sentiment."

"You'll certainly puzzle the child if you talk as fast and as much nonsense as you generally do," put in Mrs. Caryll. I had not been in the house five minutes before she told me to call her Cousin Alice, but this I really hardly liked to do, for it was the first time I had ever met her. Our branch of the family had quarrelled and broken off all connection with theirs centuries ago, and somehow, even up to now, we had never had much to do with our cousins. On our side it had come about very naturally, for my father being in the Diplomatic Service, all my childhood had been spent abroad, and we had only just come back to settle down in England. But it so happened that mother and I met Cousin Roger staying in the same country house and made friends at once, and we had hardly got home again before General Caryll's letter came asking us to go and see them at the Priory.

"Of course the notion of feuds between us in these days is ridiculous, but certainly circumstances have been against our meeting. . . . Now, however, that chance has brought this generation together, will not you and your wife cement good fellowship by a visit to the old family place?"

"Ah, they've got the place, but we the money, I fancy," commented my father.

"Perhaps because we've no family place to spend it on," said mother.

But I could see the invitation had pleased them both very much, and we had settled to accept it when father got one of his bad sciatica attacks. Mother would not leave him, but they seemed so vexed lest I should lose my pleasure, that at last I was actually sent off by myself; it was really the very first time I had ever been away alone!

"Tell me, oh! do tell me," I said. "What *was* it all about?"

"You really don't know!" Roger wheeled round in his quick, impulsive fashion, and then smiled as he glanced from me to the picture again. "Yet it's even more your history than ours. Mother, Cousin Dahlia is like her, isn't she? I told you so, and you can see the likeness now, can't you?"

"Likeness!" I repeated vaguely. "But to whom?"

"Come and look yourself," said my cousin, and he moved a chair so as to face the portrait. "That girl was an ancestress of yours—of your branch—and her name was Dahlia, too. I thought directly I met you and Mrs. Caryll how like it you were, and do you remember my telling you how you reminded me of one of the portraits here? This is the one." I got up and took the chair he had put for me, and which was in a position to let me look right into the very eyes of the two figures. So life-like were they that I could almost have fancied they were stepping down out of their frame to meet me. The girl, my namesake, was standing a little in the background, as if timidly shrinking from observation. Her face was so much in shadow I seemed only to see the great pathetic dark eyes, full of some haunting under-current of **BORROW.**

"Was she very unhappy, Roger?" I asked, looking round.

"Not when this was painted. Afterwards she was, as I'll tell you."

My eyes sought hers again. It is strange how often people doomed to tragedy bear its impress from the first—her expression could never have been carelessly gay. And against the dark background she stood like some pale shadow from another world, in her white satin frock, whose folds shimmered like moving water, while the diamonds wound in ropes about her neck and waist glittered like strings of little stars in a summer twilight sky. It seemed to me almost as if they might have been tears fallen from those mournful, frightened eyes. The man was of quite another type of character, evidently—eager and alert he held her hand, as if to urge her forward, while he seemed to be pressing on towards us out of the canvas, his bright face and blue

eyes, with a glint in them like a steel blade, turned full to the light. It was impossible for me not to see *that* likeness! I turned to my cousin impulsively.

"Oh, how like you, Cousin Roger!"

"He may well be. You know that he was a Roger, too! Roger Caryll, and that's the Marchesa! Look at her well!"

"And the story?"

"Oh! it goes back to the Civil Wars. Your people fought for Cromwell, you know, and mine—we were the senior branch—for the King. So Noll kicked us out and gave your family the property. We ought to have come in again with the Restoration, but Charles, as everyone soon found out, was much too lazy to bother himself about doing for the sons as the fathers had done for him, and one of his foreign pets, an Italian Marchese, wanted to marry this girl." He nodded at the picture. "She was the heiress, and they arranged that your branch might stay in possession here provided she consented to the match. *She* didn't want to; she was engaged to this cousin Roger. Here they are. However, that was soon disposed of, poor girl! She doesn't look very resolute, does she? She was forced to marry the Marchese. And then——"

Roger stopped to drink off a cup of tea.

"I'm afraid, then, the tragedy followed of course. They settled down at the Court—Westry Court, out yonder, you know, this Priory was only the Dower-house then. Come to the window, Cousin Dahlia, you can see the old place from there. Oh no, it's too dark, but we'll take you to-morrow and go over it. No one lives there now, we only use it for meetings and concerts and so on. We can't let it——"

"Too much out of the way," put in General Caryll rather hastily.

"What was I saying? Oh, well, poor Roger was almost crazy with grief—no wonder indeed after losing his bride and estates and everything else, and unluckily could not keep quiet. They tried to hustle him out of the country soldiering in Tangiers, but he either couldn't or wouldn't keep away; they say he haunted the place day and night just to get passing glimpses of her, and at last finding it was no use forbidding him the place, the 'authorities' simply got him marching orders, and he *had* to go. However, the story goes that these two were determined to say good-bye whatever happened, and he slipped in one night under cover of a masquerade. The Marchese was immensely proud of his wife, and filled the place with his Court-set, so that there were festivities always going on. Of course everyone ought to

have been much too busy amusing themselves to interfere with these poor things' farewells. But the Marchese heard of it somehow. He had always been cruelly jealous—perhaps naturally—and this seems to have simply maddened him. They say he stopped her then and there as she was slipping out through the hall to the rendezvous, and without waiting for a word of explanation, ran her through. He must have been really mad, poor fellow, and didn't realise what he was doing. Then he started to meet Roger outside, sprang at him out of a window, fell on his own sword and died of his wounds. Roger got off, took service under William of Orange, and only came back to England when *he* did. He got this property back then. There was a younger brother of the Marchese's, the son of a second marriage, who had succeeded.

"But Roger never would live at the Court, and we've been here ever since. That's the history, isn't it, father? We'll walk down and look over the place to-morrow, Dahlia, and I'll show you just how it all happened."

I think I almost counted the hours to our expedition, for there is a strange fascination about real bygone family romance which seems to take hold of one's very being. For though our Yorkshire home is filled with rare and beautiful things, *here* I was right in the midst of all the familiar traditions and records and relics of the house. The portraits looking down upon me from every wall were those of *my* ancestry; the armour in the galleries had been worn by my own forebears, indeed every time I passed the mailed figures standing like silent sentinels on guard it seemed to me they must be tenanted by living people who were only waiting an opportunity to speak to me; the brave deeds they had done, the honour and glory, yes, they were my heritage too, just as their name was! It was not till I came to Caryll that it was borne irresistibly in upon me how closely after all the deeds of past generations belong to the present, to be held in trust for those of the future. Home was home to me in another sense; here it meant a never-ending stream of life filtering through everything. And when I thought of Westry Court, the original home of the undivided family, these clinging influences of race and blood seized with double power upon my imagination.

It was a still damp morning when we set out; there were several other guests by that time at the Priory, and we called on the way for our near neighbour little Mrs. Lynchwood and her house-party.

I could see the high belt of elm trees swaying their top branches gently in the upper current of air long before we were near enough

to get sight of the building. It was ringed close round with them, standing on the crest of the hill while all about the ground sloped gently down and away.

"How desolate, and oh! how *unpretentious* it is after all!" exclaimed someone. To me, empty and isolated as it was, it was peopled already, and the very absence of grand architectural design strengthened the impression. The simplicity conjured up at once the daily routine of domestic life going on as it might be before our very eyes.

The front of the house rose straight and level, built of very small red bricks and covered with luxuriant green ivy. Rows upon rows of even-sized windows were set flat and plain in the walls without ornamentation or even the smallest sill. The door, exactly in the middle, nail-studded within a foot of the edge all round, was of oak, carved magnificently in its four large panels, but absolutely without porch or lintel; it was flush with ground and wall, and the grass grew close up, unbroken except where brick-laid paths shaped it into fantastic designs. We could see tall clusters of chimney stacks over the upstanding wall parapet but barely a foot of roof from where we stood, though Roger told me there were secret chambers hidden away in it, and passages running round and in and about like a veritable rabbit-warren. Then we went in. Everyone was chatting and laughing, and the echoes rang out.

"It's all hollow panelling; there are secret rooms everywhere," said Roger, and he tapped with his stick till the loud reverberations answered. "They are six feet through, these walls."

Opposite to us, as we stood in the entrance-hall, which was merely a long very wide passage, doors led away to the kitchens and back regions. One, just within, to the left, opened into suites of sitting rooms, while a little lower still a shallow flight of steps, some half-dozen perhaps, with double balustrades finely turned, went to the upper floors. As we stood at the foot, the light streamed down from a window low set on the first landing exactly facing us.

"That's where the old Marchese hopped out," observed Roger at my elbow jestingly. "And you're standing now exactly where the Marchesa was murdered. You can see marks which they say are of blood, if you look closely. But now come to the banquetting-hall."

I stooped to feel over the worn stone flags, and the dark stains—certainly there *were* marks—seemed to glow redly under my fingers. I turned and followed.

The banqueting-hall was to the right of the main entrance, and glass folding-doors opened into it, while exactly opposite, through similar ones on the other side, appeared another short flight of equally shallow steps.

"There's only one room just at the top to the left until you get right up to the attics," said my cousin, following the direction of my eyes as I paused, and divining my thoughts with ready instinct. "It's called the White Room and supposed to be haunted. We use it for a green-room when we have concerts or theatricals—suppose, oh, good idea! We will have a show for you!"

"Oh, make it a dance!" cried out Mrs. Lynchwood. She was a dark-eyed little creature, quite young and very bright.

"Oh, Mr. Caryll, do. Do let's have one. Just the place."

"Oh, but fancy hideous stiff collars and swallow-tails here!"

"Ruffles and swords and hoops would be more the thing."

"A costume dance! A masked dance, that is what it must be. Now, Mr. Caryll. Do—do say yes!"

They were all talking at once. Certainly, as we stood there, it did seem incongruous: streams of gay cavaliers would undoubtedly have been more in keeping with the place. High up to the roof went the panelling till it was lost in the shadows, but from east and west the quadruple rows of windows threw conflicting streams of light, and the stone flags, cold and hard beneath our feet, were woven into fretted trelliswork.

"A masquerade with all the old dominoes and masks we got from the carnival at Madrid last year. A drugget laid down, and a pair of fiddlers over in that corner. Myself as chaperon," cried Mrs. Lynchwood. She was running to and fro on a tour of inspection. "And all come over to Lynchwood for supper. We're so close, and no need then for disturbing Mrs. Caryll. Use your influence, Miss Caryll. Mr. Roger, your cousin, ought to see it lighted up."

"Would you like it, Dahlia?" Roger flashed round in his impetuous fashion. "Yes? We'll have it."

We passed out through a side door into the sloping terraced gardens. The wind was rising, and the elms began to sway noisily. Roger took me back through the hall.

"Is the place haunted?" I asked, glancing round rather unhappily, I'm afraid.

He turned right round to search my face with his keen bright blue eyes. "You are not frightened, dear? Of course it's all fiddle-de-dee about ghosts here. We'll have an impromptu dance to-night, and dress up in some of the old finery mother's got put

away, and it'll look quite different. It's beastly now! How pale you look, you're frozen! Come, we'll be off!"

He went on talking all the way, with my arm tucked under his.

"We'll get the Rectory people, and the Dashwoods. Then with your party, Mrs. Lynchwood, we shall be as many as we need——"

"And what shall you go as, Dahlia?" We were all standing in the Priory hall round Cousin Alice then, ransacking in anticipation the old chests full of brocades and laces which she had instantly promised to open and place at our disposal.

"Go as?" I repeated. I looked vaguely round, and involuntarily glanced at the picture. Roger's eyes followed mine.

"Of course, I know," he said promptly. "The Marchesa. There's a lot of genuine old things of that period upstairs, and very likely some of hers. You'd look exactly like her, I do believe, in a white satin like that! Picture complete!"

He spoke lightly and only in jest, and I think we scarcely realised how complete the illusion would be, till on our coming down to show ourselves before starting Roger stepped forward and placed himself at my side.

"What do you say to the picture now, Cousin Dahlia?" he asked. He was in the highest possible spirits, and immensely pleased with the success of his enterprise. I do not think it occurred to him for an instant, the underlying tragedy in the chance likeness that I could not help realising the moment I saw him in his masquerading clothes. For he stood there the exact image of the painted Roger, mulberry-coloured suit, sword, short cloak, and ruffles. And his features and expression, blue eyes, dark hair, the same alert daring. "I knew we'd a choice of braveries stowed away. Here's a posy of namesakes for you, cousin mine!"

Lady Caryll had dressed me in a white gown she had found packed away, and I had simply acquiesced in her choice without giving it a thought. Now as we stood together opposite the picture, the sadness in the girl's eyes seemed to be reproaching us for thus turning her terrible life-history into a play. But I did not like to say anything, and fastened the flowers silently to my domino, only wishing somehow it was otherwise. So we started. There were fifteen of us from the Priory, ten from the Rectory, in all some five-and-twenty couples. Everyone was in some sort of costume, though eighteenth-century brocades paired off with Elizabethan ruffs: cavalier plumes waved above Blücher boots, there were full-bottomed wigs beneath steeple-crowned Puritan hats, and powdered perukes with doublet and small hose. However it made a very gay sight.

"But you're the queen of the company," whispered Roger my ear as he tucked the white satin folds of my frock carefully round me in the carriage as we drove off, "The 'Marchesa,' you know! Queen and all to me——"

The wind had risen to a gale. The great elm trees rocked and clashed as their branches were swept together; the roar echoed and re-echoed through them like the long, low growling of distant artillery gun-practice heard across hills, and broken into every now and again by sudden loud outbursts of furious thunder. Every nook and cranny had a voice to answer, while from the unshuttered windows the blaze of light inside sent long unsteady shafts across the interlaced boughs and quivering trunks.

Inside all was warmth and gaiety. Half a dozen fiddlers had been chartered, the floor of the banqueting-hall laid with felt and drugget, and the glass door flung back on either side. Little Mrs. Lynchwood in powder and patches ran like a lapwing before us across the hall, and up the shallow steps into the White Room. It was in fact but a very few feet above the ground floor.

"Cloaks off in the old place, girls," she cried. "I saw to it all myself. We'll smother the ghosts." And she flung off her wraps, pirouetting round on her high, red heels as she fixed her mask, with a pause every now and again to tap the panelling with her mittened fingers. "They say, you know, that the real door to this room opens out of one of these panels with a spring. But the secret's lost, and so this door had to be cut! How I wish I could find it!" And picking up her skirts very daintily away she tripped, the fiddlers struck up, and in a few moments the hall was one moving kaleidoscope of colour! I danced with Roger—and only Roger, it seemed to me afterwards, all the time. Nobody even offered to part us, they seemed by tacit consent to leave us to each other. We wanted no one else. There seemed to be no one else. Or was it the wildness of the storm outside that had got hold of me—those uncanny voices calling till we were deafened to oblivion—the fiddlers were only playing the refrain that sang in our own hearts; the dancers might laugh and talk as they pleased—we had got into a world of our own. There was magic in the air. Roger seemed to have caught its infection too. He looked down at me with bright irradiating triumph in his eyes, a very recklessness of happiness, as he talked in his low vibrating tones close to my ear, and we waltzed slowly round and round together.

And now—even now, looking back calmly and dispassionately I cannot truthfully say exactly when it was I began to dream—I say dream, because that is what they all called it; or when, at

what moment, reality melted into the unsubstantial workings of fancy. Or, shall I put it plainly, at what precise point it was that I passed from the company of the living to that of creatures of hallucination! To me it was all equally real, but whatever they were, I think the influences were beginning to draw round me from the first. All I wish is to put down truthfully what I remember appeared to take place. What it was, or how it came about I cannot pretend to decide.

It was close on midnight; the storm had been gathering in strength, and was raging with terrific fury. Then there came a sudden lull, and Mr. Lynchwood recommended our taking instant advantage of it to get home.

Someone was sent for the carriages, and we all went up to put on our wraps; Roger was already dismissing the fiddlers and directing the candles and lamps to be put out as we crossed the banqueting-hall again. One by one the carriages were filled and drove off. It was hard work keeping the door open on account of the wind, which swept in long, raking blasts; the candles in the entrance hall had all to be put out, and we stood and shivered in comparative darkness while Roger went to and fro with a lantern.

"Stay for me, Dahlia," he whispered, coming up to me and catching my hand for a moment. "I can't get off till the last, as I must see the lights all safely out, and the doors locked." So I stood aside in a corner and let the others go first. Then all at once I recollected having left my domino cloak with Roger's posy pinned on it up in the White Room: I could not bear the idea of servants touching it, or having occasion to comment. There would be plenty of time. I glanced at Mrs. Lynchwood chattering with two or three girls and looking as though she did not expect to get off for hours to come. I would just run up and get it myself.

I slipped again into the deserted banquet-hall, sped up the steps and opened the door of the White Room. There was a light still burning, and it did not take me a moment to snatch up my domino. Then Roger's voice, calling me, warned me to hurry. I had the door-handle in my fingers, when a sudden draught of wind through the far window tore it from my grasp and banged the door to. The light was very dim; I fumbled about for the handle fruitlessly, I *could* not find it, could not see it; grope as I might, there met me nothing but the smooth pannelled surface.

Roger's voice, raised to a shout as he called again for me, came up from the hall below; I threw myself with all my might upon

the door; it would not yield. I screamed, called—beat the wood frantically with my fists—screamed again!

Then I heard, as it were in the distance, the clang of the heavy entrance door as it shut to, the crack of a whip, and the sound of carriage-wheels driving away. No one had seen me leave, evidently they thought I had gone on. They had left me behind! I flew to the window and dashed it open; the wind only caught my voice to toss it mockingly from tree to tree. I stood for some moments breathless, panting, frightened, almost to unconsciousness.

Then all at once the gale suddenly dropped, dropped right down into a still, lifeless silence, and upon that silence there fell upon my ears the bright rippling of fiddles from the hall below, a quick, lively gavotte, to which my foot involuntarily began to beat time. Certainly, too, I could hear the scraping of the dancers' feet!

"Oh, of course," I said aloud, scrambling down from the window, and with a sigh of relief. "How stupid of me! That wasn't the last carriage at all, and they're just having a little farewell dance till it can come back for them. Now the wind's dropped, too, they'll be able to hear me. I'll call again."

But one casual glance out of the open window I did give as I turned away, and I remember it struck me that while the wind had certainly dropped, the elms were still swaying and rocking just as wildly as before! It never occurred to me then to think it weird, any more than to be frightened now. I knew I had not been left behind. I went to the door again, and called very loud:

"Roger!"

"Hush! Not so loud, dear. You'll bring them all here. Here I am. I couldn't come before."

And there he was, eager, flushed and breathless, close behind me.

"How did you come in?" I exclaimed. "Did you hear me calling you?"

"Of course I did. Didn't you expect me, ma belle?"

"But how did you get in?"

"Up by the ivy; you had the window open all ready! The usual means of entrance when we mayn't have stairs. Didn't you see me? The horses are below. What's wrong with the door?"

"I can't open it."

"You've forgotten the spring. Silly little child. See here!"

He ran his finger along a panel. It opened readily.

"Mrs. Lynchwood said it was a panel. She said——"

"Hark!" he said, and in the dim light I saw his face suddenly

change, and the reckless fire give place to hard-set resoluteness of line.

"They're calling for you. You must go. Put on the domino, quick!"

"But you're coming?"

"No. No. Not this way. Not *with* you—though we'll meet again! I'll come down presently."

Round the open door I could catch a glimpse of the hall, fully lit up once more, blazing, indeed, upon the bright variegated figures winding in and out.

There came up a cry—"The Marchesa! Where is the Marchesa?"

"Go! You *must* go—or they'll be up here—I shall expect you later—presently. Kiss me once, Dahlia! You'll come? You trust me?"

"The Marchesa! the Marchesa!" they cried again and again, from below.

"I don't understand, quite!—oh, how cold your hands are, Roger, and all wet!"

"'Tis the rain and wind. Are my lips cold, too?"

He laughed strangely over my hands as he held them, then drew the domino hood over my head and pushed me through the door. I stood for a moment perplexed and wondering, then the extraordinary brilliancy of the hall below riveted my attention.

There were branching candelabra all down the walls, between portraits and shining designs in steel spears and swords, which sent back a flashing network of light. Antlers, flags and hanging tapestry covered the panelling too, right up to the roof. And such a lot of people were moving about—surely far more splendidly dressed than any who had come with us, and their clothes all seemed to be of the same pattern as Roger's and mine. Only my frock was richer than any other there, the shimmer of the satin folds as I moved slowly down the steps reminded me of nothing so much as rivulets of bright moonlit water, though the women's dresses were studded with jewels flashing in ruddy waves of fire, and the richly-chased sword-hilts of the men sparkled with them too, and there was a profusion of glittering gold lace and twinkling diamond shoe-buckles. But there were two things that puzzled me. The fiddlers were put up all by themselves in a little overhanging gallery which I had never noticed before; and bright as the hall was, I could not distinguish anyone's features amongst the dancers. Each face seemed a black shadow. "How stupid of me! Of course, they've put on their masks again!" I thought, and just then they

all turned at sight of me, and began waving their arms in greeting.

"Here she is! Here's the Marchesa!"

As I paused, a little puzzled—what were they doing it for?—a tall big man detached himself from the others and came hurrying towards me.

I waved him back, I wanted to make haste and cross the hall to find Roger again.

"Where's Roger?" I said. "It's Roger, my cousin, I want."

He only stopped in front of me, and with his sword barred my way, repeating my words and Roger's name in a sort of rising crescendo. It made me feel vexed and even frightened. Was it some game, some silly game?

"Let me pass, please! He's waiting for me. I must go."

He only laughed; and such a horrible laugh. All the echoes began to answer, and the fiddlers at once stopped playing and the people began to crowd round, pressing every minute nearer and closer, but still I could not distinguish anyone's face. And the man went on laughing, holding his sides and rocking to and fro, while they all seemed to be waiting, waiting for something.

"Who are you?" I cried, and I made as if to push him to one side angrily with both hands. "Why are you playing this trick on me? Who are you?"

"What, Marchesa! Not know me?"

I turned helplessly from one to the other.

"No, I don't. None of you. And——"

And then suddenly as I looked, there glided out of the shadows a figure. A figure of a woman, a girl just like me, dressed just like me, beneath her long domino cloak I caught the sheen of white, a figure which came slipping, slipping round through the hall as if trying to escape notice.

The man barring my way all at once wrenched at my domino, and tore it from shoulder to hem; the stuff ripped out in a long triangular strip. His fingers burnt like fire, he seized my arm, and glared with red staring eyes in my face, close, closer, and then with a bound suddenly flung me away, and dashed after the shadowy, shrinking replica of myself. His naked sword was in his hand, horror was in the air; what impulse moved me I do not know, but after him I went. Behind us rose a clamour beyond all description—voices, clashing swords, and sounds of scuffling feet. At the doorway I intercepted them, she fled through as he struck at her, and his sword came down on my wrist. Before I could recover myself, he had overtaken her at the foot of the staircase; the steel flashed and plunged deep, she fell in a heap.

"*Roger, Roger!*" Was it I who cried?—or she? I was at her side.

Upon the front door there came a crash of furious knocking, there was another just above me of broken glass, and scurrying footsteps.

"*Dahlia!*" My cousin stood in the doorway; but his voice broke upon dim dark silence, and the flickering stream of his lantern full turned upon me alone pierced the shadows. Lights, voices, people, all had gone. I was standing at the foot of the central staircase, I saw his pale face, *that was all*. But illusion was strong upon me yet, I looked for the figure at my feet, the crash of glass rang still in my ears.

"Quick! Oh, Roger, she's dead!"

"Dead! What's all this. How was it you got left? What——?"

He strode impetuously in.

"She's dead—oh, look at the blood!" I seemed to be standing in a pool.

"The blood's on your own dress! You've cut yourself!"

He bit back whatever was rising to his lips. I had still no sense of what he meant.

"The sword. He hit me instead of her. Oh, Roger, *go*. Go quick after him! Where is she?"

I tell this as it seemed to me. What Roger thought I do not know. But he gripped me hard, and set down the lantern, and began tying up my arm with his sword scarf.

"No wonder you're imagining all sorts of things. Keep still, Dahlia. Inexcusable to have left you here."

He spoke very roughly and almost angrily, and went on tying up my arm, talking determinedly and in a quick hard way, without letting me utter a syllable.

"Oh, Roger, why are you angry? Why didn't you come before?"

"Thought you were at the Rectory—that you'd gone on by mistake with them. They said you had."

"But where are they all?" I looked fearfully round. It was all so bewildering.

"Gone home, long ago. Now we'll go. Come at once."

He would not loosen his grip one second, and literally carried me away. I noticed the wind had got up again, and it almost swept us off our feet, but at the gates the carriage was waiting.

"Oh, Roger," I said, "do go back and try to find him. It was that window on the stairs. You heard the glass——"

"I'm going back," said Roger shortly.

He put me into the carriage, and spoke to one of the men with him who got in with me, and began rearranging the rugs, talking volubly all the time. It seemed long before my cousin came back.

"Did you find him?" Roger only pulled up the window.

"How's your hand?" He took it in his.

"But why didn't you come down with me?"

"I did, directly I found you were left behind."

"But before, when you climbed up by the ivy?"

Roger only put his arm strongly round me.

"How the wind blows! Didn't Mrs. Lynchwood look pretty?"

"She was wrong about that panel. You found it quite easily. Oh, Roger, what's become of the Marchesa, the real Marchesa? They thought *I* was the real Marchesa."

The carriage stopped for a moment at the lodge gates, and their lamps threw a gleam on Roger's face. I saw it full. All at once illusion died—*this* was reality. He was gripping me closer and harder as my eyes scanned his. What then of the rest? And all at once there swept over me the most awful paralysing sensation of fear, sickening, terrible, clutching fear, unlike anything I had felt before that night with all its horrors, fear such as I hardly know how to describe. Roger pressed my head down on his shoulder, and held it there with his other hand. I don't know what he was saying, but had it not been that he literally held me by force I would have jumped head-long out.

And I do not recollect anything more till I woke to find my own mother sitting beside me.

* * * * *

I told my story when we next all met in the library.

"Poor child! You must have been dreadfully frightened left all alone! It was enough to make you imagine anything!" said my mother, caressing my wounded wrist.

"It was most wrong of Roger to be telling you all his foolish stories!" added Cousin Alice quickly. "No wonder you fancied you saw the whole thing acted before you! Now, Roger, let this be a lesson to you. You might have most seriously injured your cousin!"

"Dahlia's such an excitable child, too," added my mother. "I suspect, dear, you cut your wrist trying to force open that window."

"Very likely it was the pain made you feel faint, too, most probably indeed. And you got downstairs, not knowing quite what you were doing, *fancying* all these things, half-unconsciously."

But somehow their voices did not ring very true. I looked at Roger.

"Tell me," I said. "You *will* tell me exactly, won't you? What happened when you missed me?"

"I thought you were in one of the other carriages. Mrs Lynchwood said she had seen you getting in, she thought. When I didn't find you at Lynchwood, I thought you must have got in the Rectory carriage by mistake—they decided to go straight back on account of the weather, you know—and drove round at once to fetch you."

"Then why did you stop at the Court?"

Roger was playing with a paper-knife: he hesitated, and then met the challenge to truth which filled my eyes.

"We pass it, you know, on the way. There seemed to be lights—yes, father, it's no use glossing it over—the men, Muffins and James, saw them too. That's exactly why we *did* stop, thinking that some of the party must have gone back to have a little private hop to themselves. You see I'd seen to the lamps being put out myself."

"And did you hear anything, Cousin Roger?"

"Yes, I did. The music had begun again. I was inclined to be angry, I can tell you, at the idea of anyone having gone back again once I'd locked up the place and we'd all said good-bye, so I pounded hard with my sword-hilt on the door just to frighten them well before I unlocked it. Then, well, it all stopped. There was nothing and nobody but Dahlia. Her wrist was out as you saw, and was bleeding all down her dress. I got her to the carriage and went back at once."

"You thought probably there had been burglars or persons of that sort who had possibly got in before, and been in hiding till they fancied you were all gone?" put in General Caryl anxiously.

Roger glanced at him. "Possibly so," he said with great deliberation. "The place was empty, however, by the time I got back, for I went all over it. Only the White Room I couldn't open. The wind was whistling inside to such an extent however, that I guessed the window must be open, so I went round outside and climbed up the ivy easily enough. There was a candle burning, otherwise the place was as I presume the ladies had left it. I broke the door open with my sword, smashed the panel right in, and went through the hall that way. The glass doors were closed and locked as I had left them."

"But I saw no glass doors, Cousin Roger. And didn't you see the gallery?"

"I added the doors, and the gallery came down in my father's time," began General Caryll, and then as hastily checked himself. Roger went on evenly.

"I found the stairs window smashed; on the grass outside—I went outside all round—I found this——"

He pointed to a rusty old sword, of antique make, lying on the table before him.

"One of our party probably dropped it," he added steadily. "But I show it to you, Dahlia, because I make no doubt there was someone in the house with you. Tramps very likely, in hiding, as father says, in some of those old chambers I told you of. For aught we know there may be a whole colony squatting there who know the ins and outs. Of course, that I shall make it my business to find out: there are subterranean passages to the church, I know. And I would rather you were able to feel convinced that part of what happened was true. You probably conjured up a good deal with the fright."

"And my torn domino?" I said. "I've brought it down to show you."

It had just been rolled up and flung anyhow into my wardrobe, and was stained and crumpled and torn. I shook it out. The long triangular piece of rent stuff, jagged-edged, fell away, hanging but by a few strands to the hem. Where it had been wrenched from the shoulder were marks of fingers. "You tore it when you put your hand, dearest," cried my mother.

But I turned it over silently, and showed again on the back another distinct impress of a hand. It had the appearance of having been scorched in upon the material. None of us spoke, but General Caryll suddenly walked across to the book-shelf and pulled out a volume.

It bore the title '*Records of East Kent*,' and under the heading *Westry Court*, he found the pages he wanted.

"It is said," he quoted, reading aloud, "that on the anniversary of this sad and shocking tragedy, January 11th, the scene is re-enacted in every detail. No well authenticated testimony to the truth of this legend has yet been proffered, but it is said to hold good until the spell is broken by——"

He stopped reading.

My mother and Cousin Alice and Roger were all looking at each other.

"It was the 11th!" exclaimed Roger. "How could we have forgotten!"

"It never occurred to me!" added my Cousin Alice, agitatedly.

"Let me see the book," cried my mother, springing up. General Caryll silently pointed with his finger to the place, and her eyes followed it as it went down the page till she too stopped. And up into his face she looked for a moment with a smile, and then across at Cousin Alice. They both glanced at Roger, still smoothing out the folds of the domino with knitted brow. And then at me!

I crept up behind her, and so I read for myself:

"Will hold good till the two rival branches of the Caryll family shall once again find their claims respectively vested in a son and a daughter whose fortunes united by marriage shall restore the unity of the house."

I knew then why General Caryll had ceased to read aloud, and why they smiled, and why they suddenly seemed to have forgotten to care to explain away my story any more.

And though I begged Roger to take away and destroy both that domino and that sword, yet I do not mind visiting Westry Court now—with him. The whole place was searched and sounded for his satisfaction, but for mine—well, now the legend is fulfilled in every detail, I do not mind believing *any* part of it.

VIOLET A. SIMPSON.



The Dark of the Moon.

It lies some little distance from the Medici villa, but tradition says that the wood formed part of the grounds where the magnificent Lorenzo held court in the summers. There are houses now between the queer old villa with its outside staircases and arched passages, and this fragment of *bosco* clothing the hillside above the brook. But once under the ilex and cypress, the twisting paths and shaped corners for seats and shelters still remain probably unchanged from the old gallant Renaissance days.

It is an eerie place even by day, for the sunshine scarcely flickers through the thick trees, and there is something remote and hushed in the quiet. You know that the high road runs but a few yards above you, that the brook skips along over its smooth stones not far below, and that there are cheerful modern houses full of people within call, and yet the impression is one of chill mystery. I have stood in a Druid oak-grove, I have ridden over the stones of a British encampment where the larches sing Welsh songs above one's head and the black Roman cherry hangs its fruit over the edge of the clearing beyond, I have been lost in woodlands on dim winter evenings, but nowhere else have I felt such a sense of unhuman, haunting evil as in the little *bosco* which the country-people hurry past with a prayer on their lips if they have to take that road after nightfall.

It is a *bizarre* fascinating sensation, the ghost-thrill, and one too rare to be lightly prized. The danger of its deepening into genuine cold fear rather increases one's desire for the experiment until the moment of action. One would risk much in these outworn days for a really new æsthetic emotion, and scepticism makes for artistic appreciation of the truly uncanny.

There were two young people discussing these things after dinner one warm spring evening.

"I'm quite sure I shouldn't mind seeing anything if I had someone with me. But I can get frightened easily enough alone," she said.

An elder man, who was only taking a fitful part in the talk, relaxed into a smile as he recognised the well-known touch—her look at him with the implied confidence.

If they had been alone the young man would doubtless have said something foolish, and there would have been an interlude not concerning ghosts.

As it was he remarked: "Then shall we take a walk about the wood down there, and see what we shall see? Lorenzo himself might be there to-night."

Perhaps their desire for solitude had as much to do with it as a wish for experiences. At any rate she thought it a good idea, announced their intention to her mother—who hoped she wouldn't take cold—put a wrap round her head and declared herself ready.

"They're very pretty to watch," said the elder man.

"Yes, dear children!" said her mother without enthusiasm. "But boring to talk to," she went on.

"We were all young once," sighed the elder man with mock pathos.

"Oh, a long time ago. Come and play *bésique*," said the lady comfortingly, and they thought no more of the young people. Meanwhile, unrestrained by onlookers, he was talking nonsense and she was laughing happily as they went down the stony road together.

Across the bridge the rise gleamed dull grey against the dark trees.

"It's the dark of the moon, the time for bad things to be about," she said with a little shiver as she stumbled over a loose stone.

"It's light of the stars, though," he answered, touching her arm with the protecting gesture that it gave him such a thrill of joy to have the right to use.

"Here's the easiest gap," he went on, stopping in front of a dark place where the clipped cypress hedge was broken and unmended.

He helped her carefully through the hole, and they stood together silently for a moment.

The trees closed over their heads, letting no scrap of steel sky or star-shine through their thickness. There was a dead chill silence as if no living thing were near.

She laid her hand on his arm, and the faint motion was an audible termination of the spell.

Nevertheless he spoke in a whisper involuntarily.

"What a queer place it is! Shall we go down to the round clearing that looks so like a place for an altar?"

She was wishing herself back on the safe high road, but she summoned her trust in him, and said faintly: "If you like."

But she held his arm with a closer grip than she was aware.

Presently they got used to the startling sound of their own footsteps, and his voice rose nearly to its normal pitch as he bade her mind a stone or hole.

They reached the round clearing where one or two flat stone seats, green with moss, remain.

"What could it have been for?" he said.

"Oh, a summer-house, perhaps."

"Very likely it's all modern, and Lorenzo never came here at all. Only one likes to think that he did. All those long ago poets, and painters, and princes, and ladies, seem so real and near somehow. I suppose it's because the world is so old and worn-out in our days, that we like them and their lovely fresh art. You're not cold, May?"

"No, only—oh, come away, Reggie, it's rather horrid here. Don't laugh, but I thought I saw something white moving in the bushes over there."

"White's the traditional ghost-colour. I wish I could see it. Well, let's go back, dear, if you like."

She had dropped his arm, and now sped up a path—not that they had come by—in front of him. She tried to restrain herself, but the desire of flight was upon her, and she could hardly keep from breaking into a run. Suddenly an overhanging bough caught the fluffy wrap round her head and checked her.

"Oh, mind, dear," he cried, coming to the rescue. But it was not a hurt from the bough that made her gasp with a little choking cry.

Coming swiftly and noiselessly down the path towards them was something white.

He flung her sideways into the brake as the thing crouched for a spring.

He never knew quite what happened. There was the choking sensation of being at grips with a great hairy beast, a sickening smell like nothing else in the world, and, putting forth his strength till he could fancy his bones cracking, he flung himself free.

After a moment's dizziness he found himself on the ground, the good safe earth still rocking under him to his fancy, and May's arms round him.

"It's all right, darling. Sure you're not hurt?" he muttered as he rose shakily.

The girl was calm and collected now that the danger was

present and visible. It had been the foreboding that had unnerved her.

"I'm quite safe, Reggie," she said gravely; "but there's blood on your arm."

"Only a scratch."

He held it out to her. The shirt cuff was torn, and there were fang-marks on his arm, the one nearest the wrist dripping blood. She tied her handkerchief round it tenderly, but in silence. He was still striving with himself for mastery over the curious waves of emotion that shook him. There was a feeling of deadly fear and shrinking from something mysterious and terrible, and yet he was conscious of a desire to wait, crouched there in the undergrowth, for the return of his enemy, and slay it, not in fair fight, but craftily. And he found his fingers straying mechanically to where a knife should be, but was not.

May's voice made him pull himself together.

"Yes, yes, of course we'll go home, dear."

"Not that way, Reggie. The road's above us."

"Oh, of course." But as he agreed and followed her upwards, he felt a nightmare certainty that she was wrong, and that they would only wander on into the great woods and be entirely lost.

They reached the road in a few moments, and the girl made her way through the fence first, and with no helping hand this time.

As they stood in the comparative light of the open space, she turned to him, her composure at breaking point.

But he did not take her in his arms, as surely he might have felt was her desire.

"What was it, May?" was all he said.

"A great white dog," she answered. "One of those big Maremma beasts the shepherds say are half wolves. How splendidly you tackled him, Reggie! But I never was so horribly frightened in all my life before."

He did not tell her how plucky she was, though he might have known that most women would have screamed or fainted and been exceedingly uncomfortable companions in such an adventure.

Indeed, he said very little on their way home, but as they reached the gate he begged her not to say anything about the affair to the others.

"Only you must have your arm seen to, Reggie. Oughtn't it to be cauterised, or something?"

"Nonsense, dear. I don't believe it's really a bite at all—a scratch from a bramble, or the beast's claw, perhaps."

He spoke with some irritation, which she put down to the pain he was doubtless concealing, and beautiful modesty, which made him more of a hero than ever.

So she agreed obediently, and put up her face for the kiss he seemed to have forgotten.

The elders greeted them placidly, observed that they had been a long time, and that it was late.

Only as they were exchanging good-nights, the elder man said to Reggie, with a yawn: "So you didn't meet old Lorenzo's ghost? He might have walked to-night, for it's the 8th of April, the day he died at the villa down there, with all his crimes unabsolved."

May passed a restless, dream-troubled night, as was natural enough after such a shock, but the sunny morning seemed to put things on to their usual level again. Until she tried to find Reggie alone—it was their habit at that period to be always searching for chances of a *tête-à-tête*—and then she was a little puzzled and startled. Reggie was not at her disposal; he was full of affairs that had never troubled him before, and he had totally forgotten their arrangement to go out and pretend to paint in the pine-wood behind the house, where one could spend a long, lazy afternoon in solitude if one chose.

She was hurt and offended, but wise enough to demand no explanation. After dinner she went to the piano, instead of helping him to smoke on the terrace, as usual, and her bewilderment increased when he showed no desire to come near her, but muttered something about letters to write and left the room.

"Reggie's energetic and May's moping," remarked the elderly man under cover of the rather stormy music.

"They've quarrelled, of course," said her mother, indifferently. "Why do you take such an interest in a very ordinary pair of children?"

"I renew my youth in them," he answered.

"Really? Now they simply bore me."

"That's because my youth is so much farther behind me than yours, dear lady."

She laughed, and bade him mind the game.

Reggie, meanwhile, was writing no letters. He was pacing the library with his head in a whirl of new and curious ideas. Never before had his loafing, happy, idle life seemed unsatisfactory. To be more or less of an artist, to have only a comparative insufficiency of money and fair prospects from a worldly point of view, to have plenty of pleasing friends, and to be engaged to a

charming girl, had seemed all that man could desire. He had long ago decided that his *métier* was to appreciate, not create, which is an excuse for doing as little work as is consistent with having the best time possible. Now that thing he had always slightly despised, ambition, was stirring in him.

No vulgar longing for fame or money, of course. But to be a power in the land, by well-laid plans to become a king over men, was worth any effort.

He possessed an uncle, whose acquaintance he had hitherto shunned as much as decency permitted, but who now appeared in the light of a stepping-stone. This person was a dispenser of good things in that slimy political world through which lay the way to greatness. He began to think of schemes, subjects he would have to study, men he might easily use, heights quite attainable to a man who meant to let nothing stand before his object. And then power and wealth were but the foundations of a splendid life. Painters, writers, and musicians should lay their gifts before him, and he had the knowledge to choose and appreciate the best of all the arts. He would be a prince among the really great, a fosterer of genius and the leader and founder of another Renaissance. Among the wild, dizzy fancies rose May's face. Ah, but there were other women, lovelier and more clever than she. They would be his, too, for a great man may be royally catholic in all his tastes.

The scratch on his arm itched, and he undid the bandage over it. There were the teeth marks, fading into bruises on the unbroken skin, and one red, angry spot—the place that had bled. He covered it and resumed his restless walk, thinking, thinking endlessly. Every now and then he would, as it were, pause to look at himself, and wonder if these mad, extravagant dreams were really his. It was a curious sense of dual consciousness, and it troubled him less and less as he felt that the dreams were bold, but possible, plans. The world was very easily conquered by a man who was both bold and crafty, and he felt within himself the power to be such an one.

The night was going on, and the house was quiet, when a longing for fresh air and open space seized him. It was simple to undo the French window and be out upon the terrace which ran round two sides of the house and commanded a great view of valley and mountain.

At first the misty expanse, grey and shadowy under the clear stars, soothed him. Then the dream-madness took him by the throat again. It seemed as if thoughts too big for his brain oppressed and dazed him. He was drunk with ideas impossible

of expression, and something beyond and apart from this earthly world stood at his mind's elbow urging him to realisation and action. It was more than human body and mind could bear, and there was a horror of evil over it all.

May could not sleep for the dreary puzzled sense of estrangement from her lover. What had she done? How had it come about? What did it mean?

The questions had no answer, and sleep stood off further and further as she thought and wondered.

At last she rose, and undid the *persiani*, as we all turn in trouble to the outside air for comfort.

On the terrace below was something dark, like a coat flung against the low red wall. As her eyes got used to the dimness she saw more plainly. It was a man crouched motionless, half on his knees and with his head and arms on the wall.

It was Reggie.

She was more puzzled than ever. What was wrong? He was obviously in bad trouble, that explained everything, but why had he not told her, and what could have happened? Just then her eyes were drawn in spite of herself in the other direction. At the corner where the terrace ended in a gravel walk stood a huge white dog.

With quite unreasoning instinct she felt danger. There was no time for thought, but she sped along the passage from her room, unlocked the little door at the end and was down the steps that led to the terrace before she realised her action.

There was a creeping sense of horror—perhaps it was only the chill of the night breeze against her bare ankles—but she turned boldly towards the white thing now in the shadow by the corner.

"*Via!*" she cried, breaking a lemon off a tree standing by, and flinging this only weapon within reach of the shadow. The great beast leaped on to the wall, gave one savage snarl at her, its yellow eyes glowing with evil rage, and disappeared noiselessly.

The drop from the terrace wall at that point was a sheer forty feet.

But May was only thinking of her lover. She ran to him put her face to his, hidden in his arms, and called him gently. He stirred as if in heavy sleep.

Presently he roused to her kisses and endearments.

"May, little girl!" he muttered.

"It's all right, Reggie. Oh, what is the matter? Do tell me all about it."

"There's nothing wrong," he said, getting to his feet and taking her in his arms.

"What are you doing here, May darling, at this time of night?" he went on.

"I saw you from my window. Oh, Reggie, don't be horrid to me any more."

She burst into uncontrollable sobs in his arms. He was tender and remorseful enough to appease a far more deeply offended girl, and presently she grew more composed.

"But there's nothing to explain, dearest. I've never felt in the least differently towards you," he repeated.

"Ah, you have, Reggie. Ever since that horrid dog jumped on us—and, do you know, it was here again to-night——"

"My dearest child, you're dreaming. What dog? You're very fanciful, little girl. I can't remember exactly how I came here, but I must have gone to the library for something and wandered out here and fallen asleep. Stupid thing to do. And then you had a bad dream and saw me from your window, and were dear enough to think something was wrong and to come down and wake me. And I should certainly have caught a cold if you hadn't. There, that's all about it, isn't it? Now we'll both go to bed, and you'll sleep properly, won't you, little goose?"

She looked at him. He certainly did not remember, and she certainly did not understand, so it was better to say nothing more.

Only she could not forbear to ask if his arm were hurting him.

"My arm? Oh yes, I scratched it yesterday and you put your handkerchief round it. Must I give it back, my lady, or may I keep it round my wrist for ever?" He undid it as he spoke, and she touched his wrist anxiously. There was but the faintest red scar that might easily have been a souvenir of a bramble.

So she kissed him again, and they crept upstairs quietly. And in the morning it all seemed verily a dream. He was the same idle, cheerful, companionable Reggie as ever, asking no more of life than to play with his lady through the spring days.

But May never passed the *Medici bosco* without a shudder, though she asked no questions and spoke no more of the happenings of those two nights.

Perhaps the peasants are not far wrong in their avoidance of the place. Certainly it is not healthy on the night when the dark of the moon falls about the 8th of April.

M. HARTLEY.

An Open Door.

I.

LADY ARMITAGE settled herself upon the sofa, with a gesture too finished to be quite spontaneous, accompanied by an unpremeditated sigh.

The other occupant of the room was her daughter Stella, whose irremediable mediocrity had alienated early her mother's interest in her career.

Of the fact that her younger sister absorbed it Stella was vividly aware, it was a consciousness on which, for her, the sun rose every day.

She had been the recipient of her mother's hopes—ambitions—schemes, with regard to Laurence, and she was now the confidante of her despair.

"I wrote no details," said Lady Armitage, with an air of frank exhaustion. "I was and am," she smoothed the wrinkles from a glove which she was coaxing up a plump, reluctant finger, "too unnerved, too broken. If it were a death, one might resign oneself; but this is paralysing. What can one give out? One doesn't even know what line to take."

"What line does Laurence take?"

"Suicidal immobility. To repulsive gossip—immobility, to natural affection—immobility. One might be droning through the Litany, and instead of the obvious Good Lord deliver us, she repeats the stupefying formula—'It's true enough but I have no choice.'"

"Perhaps she has no choice. Aren't fanatics usually beyond it? and there are occasions"—Stella's thought was edged with something keener than a mere impersonal reflection—"when one may have a very small amount of choice."

"No choice, no fiddlestick! And if you are going to bolster up your sister in this moonstruck business, I give in. Birching-

ton won't marry now, unless he gets entangled with his nurse, which God forbid! I hear he's failing rapidly, and unless things take a very unexpected turn, Tony will be Lord Birchington before the year is out. Is that a chance to fling away to go and preach to pigtails—yes, the last barbaric touch is China!—and get decapitated with the next deserving batch of methodistical mischief-makers? But it's all too frightful and amazing when one remembers her advantages; the most ruinous school in Paris, the most thievish milliner in town."

"Isn't it doubtful whether a suburban education and an inexpensive taste in hats would have averted the catastrophe? You know papa had crazes, supported women's suffrage and collected Huguenot wills—and——"

"Your poor father, Stella, never went beyond absurdity. If this were only silly—but it's low. It *sounds* so low, and—and—violent. One knows of two or three nice girls with disappointments or deformities who have very properly taken vows,—but—a missionary! As I said to Laurence when she brought it out, Why not a cassowary or a kangaroo! I was quite light-headed."

"What is the process; I suppose there is a scheme?"

"Merciful Heaven, is there not a scheme! A course, a three years' course, a whirligig of physio and jargon in the company of over-educated riff-raff in some neighbourhood called Bloomsbury. I said at once she couldn't have the brougham, but it appears, and providentially, that piety contents itself with cabs. It's all sublimity and flighty twaddle. The duties and decencies of life, of course, are dross. I hear from Bennet, she is giving half her evening frocks away."

"That suggests more than a passing whim."

"She wrote last night to Tony giving him his *congé* as calmly as you leave an *entrée*, and you talk of passing whims!"

"They must have quarrelled."

"My dear good simpleton, you cannot quarrel with stained glass, a flat saint in a painted window is the present pose. The next stage will be seeing visions. *Après!* Well, I wish you joy of coming back to this volcano of a house and waiting for the next eruption."

"That will probably not be in our direction. If I know Tony, he will do his share."

For her part, Stella did not contemplate more than the mildest interference. Laurence had persistently, not consciously, indeed, but most effectually made her ineffective, and if fate, if folly, intervened so late on her behalf, by all the laws of compensation

why not let them intervene? She took a book from a side table and began to turn the leaves.

But Lady Armitage proceeded buoyantly, "Talk of religion! I consider it profane. If it were one of those poor Howard girls, one could see some sort of a divine provision in it, or Winifred du Port, an incarnation of morbid fads, hygienic underclothes, large candles and small clergy, there's your article ready-made. But Laurence is not even *passée*!"

"Or if it were I!" commented Stella, placidly, "the element of tragedy would disappear, my opportunities being meagre, my distinction *nil*, my present and future, in fine, devoid of any possibilities which annihilation could affect. I admit, with compunction, it should certainly have been—I."

"My dear Stella, don't, for goodness' sake, be so incorrigibly selfish. Is this a moment for a display of egotism when your sister's social and practical salvation is at stake?"

"Need one take the matter quite so seriously? The probation will prove too unpleasant. Time will mix his usual sedative and she will take it. I imagine Laurence——"

The supposition was not achieved; it was arrested by the entrance of the girl herself. She supported wonderfully a wonderful gown, but she wore beauty with a more positive and finished grace.

The apparel with which God clothes His creatures is, but for the rents man's fall may make in it, most fitting; hers was exquisitely fine. Fineness was its distinctive texture, fairness its prevailing hue. The white skin, delicately flushed, the features not severe in detail, but statuesque in purity of structure, the hazel eyes darting at times an almost yellow light, were crowned with hair, which, but for its pale brilliancy, looked like a covering of blanched and faded gold. To-night, her neck and arms were bare, and the slight, upright figure asserted its youth and serious simplicity of outline in spite of an elaborate and costly gown.

Lady Armitage greeted this apparition with another aggressive sigh, while nodding approval of her daughter's toilette.

Stella looked up and said, without inflection, "You look as usual like a truant angel; but mamma has just proved conclusively that you are merely a wayward, feverish and very stupid child."

"I cannot refute mamma," the girl said, with a note of weariness.

Her intonation was slow and extremely clear, a high, sweet treble. Someone had called it a "retarded voice," and it was certainly marked by an unstudious drawl.

"Do you know," her sister proceeded, "what people will say if this ridiculous report of your broken engagement gets about?"

"Much that is absurd, probably. I cannot speculate."

"They will say you have been jilted."

"Fortunately, or unfortunately, that is exactly the reverse of fact."

"So much the better for its plausibility. The world does not restrict itself to facts."

"The 'world,' or our small section of it, may as well leave me out of its reckoning; I shall so soon be leaving it out of mine."

"Miserable child; but *we* aren't leaving it!" her mother broke in with a gesture of acute exasperation. "Stella and I remain to face the innuendos and grimaces, the revolting rumours upon which you turn your back."

"And you will deal with them infinitely better than I ever could."

"That is true enough," said Stella, "but irrelevant. The world—to use a phrase—mamma and I and Tony, may all be immensely inferior to the exigencies of your suddenly-discovered soul or mission, or whatever it may be, but you owe us more consideration, more response."

"To remonstrance? What answer can I give. This new voice in my ear contends against old voices, insists that I relinquish near, dear things, for what is strange and far."

"You can at least show us the consideration of delay," Stella pursued, urging the point most likely to win concession.

Laurence got up and with an unusually rapid motion pushed back her chair.

"Ah! no," she cried, seeming in one swift gesture to thrust off the vision of that angel who was spreading an unlawful world before her view. "*That* I cannot do. Delay is, for me, denial. What I do I must do quickly. Oh! mamma and I have talked so much of this, and words have availed so little. Will you not leave it for to-night?" With a lingering, halting sweetness of appeal, a plea on her own side for patience, she added, "Things cannot seem so strange to anyone as they do just now to me."

She crossed the room ostensibly to reach her cloak from a table by the window, where it had been flung upon her entrance; but her real movement was towards her sister—an appeal for recognition, comprehension. Stella connected her approach with a domestic grievance and rose to push a curtain back and glance into the twinkling street.

"We shall have to get rid of Dykes, sooner or later; he is

making a dogma of unpunctuality," she announced, generally. Then turning to Laurence, who faced her, passive, undivined, unanswered, she observed, "In spite of perplexities, you are looking very well to-night."

The girl's aspect indeed provoked the dispassionate remark. Loveliness illumined her like a faint flame, seeming to hold its light up to the dusk of Stella's face; a face suggesting twilight, dim and dotted with unnoticeable features; dun, not dark—an early wintry dusk without the stars. Stella had sought to clear this portrait, but she retouched it with a despondent hand. The carefully-accentuated eyebrows and reticently-tinted cheeks could only partially rescue from obscurity a face which Nature meant to be ignored; and she was never unaware that this obscurity was deepened by her sister's luminous proximity, that they enforced a contrast scarcely kind. But now she suddenly flung off disloyalty. This poor little victim, standing there, discarding life, binding itself to a shadowy stake, ready to be burnt up by supernatural fire, could not assume the aspect of a foe. An impulse of compassion, then of rescue seized her, swiftly followed by the conviction of its impracticability. Laurence had put herself out of reach. She was adopting new phrases, twisting her point of view. The things most clear, and, perhaps, too, most dark, to her were those which no one but herself could see. The child, she concluded, must be left to folly, since there appeared to be no wisdom within call profound enough to protest against it, and it was upon this conclusion that she said at last, "I shall not add to your perplexities, you may reckon me among the few people who will let you be."

"That makes you my best friend."

"Or one of your worst enemies. Are you, just now, quite capable of making the distinction?"

She spoke coldly, though not a moment since she had felt the first flicker of warmth about her heart. To think coldly, and so to speak her thought, was Stella's way. On an afterthought, she said abruptly, "You have a good deal to squander, and of that youth is the costliest part. These are your best years. They will not come over again. You would be wise to ask yourself if you can spare them. But you will not be wise."

"Oh! I know I am hopeless, incurable," the girl responded lightly, yet with a wistfulness which made the light admission grave.

II

LIFE had afforded to Laurence Armitage no preparation of petty contests for this momentous one. It was the first—immediate and supreme.

She stood this afternoon confronting, in the person of her lover, the visible foe attacking that invisible Friend who had but recently, and in so strange a fashion, placed Himself beside her; and at the moment, in the presence of this man, she was acutely conscious of that combative, coercive power from which she had once shrunk, to which, linked with some gentler, but no less resistless force, she had eventually given way. He had not won this girl—whose years passed scarcely beyond the barrier of childhood, whose heart but yesterday had loitered in that garden—without some expenditure of energy and display of skill.

She had loved reluctantly, afraid of love, and yielded sweetly at the last to an allurements shorn of fear, as children will. But now, to-day, she faced in him again that spectre, shunned by the child she used to be and was no more, with ruth and tears.

"Cannot I keep your pity, though?" She spread her hands out mutely, conclusively rejecting love.

"What have you and I to do with pity? I can't offer you anything more, anything less than love."

"I would keep that." She swayed towards it. "Only to you it means simply possession, satisfaction."

"To 'have and to hold,' and all the rest. It means the same to everyone. Why, Laurie, I remember you used almost the same words. I remember the time almost to a minute, and the frock you wore and the way the light fell on your hair and the tune the band was playing; always afterwards it seemed to be your tune. 'If you will have it so,' you said, and stopped, and then, 'Yes, I am yours to care for and to keep.' Don't *you* remember? And now you speak as if it were some paltry version of my own. It once was yours."

She did not dispute it, dared not pause on such remembrances.

"You slip, then, straight out of my life?"

The attitude of strange detachment in the still white figure by the window quickened his resistance.

"No," he said decisively.

"But you called friendship, when I spoke of it, 'a threadbare story.' And I think I know you will not be my friend."

"That was never really your alternative?"

Her hands hung limply down; her lids were drooping, her

face pale; she had the aspect of a wind-weary, rainless flower. He crossed the room and caught her hanging hands.

"Laurie," he said, seriously perplexed, "you seem to have lost the power to look at anything in a natural way."

"I have," she answered simply.

"I haven't. I won't take this business to pieces. One doesn't fight with shadows; one steps through them; I step through it—come to you. It is with you I have to do, and I am here to stand between you and your unrealities, to shut them out: I mean to stand. To-day, to-morrow, you must see that I am your reality, and you will smile at this new bogey."

"That is not a good description of my new purpose."

He loosed impatiently the passive fingers, turned away.

"You would be more human, pardonable, if you wanted to jilt me for another man."

"I think not," she said sadly, "but I know that to no one do I seem either pardonable or human. You put love to my lips, I may not taste it; where did I read it? 'Some deep energy compels me to choose hunger.' I have no choice but that."

"A month ago you were yourself."

"I was my own, or yours, perhaps; or seemed to be."

"I cannot follow you—I don't pretend to find my way into your maze—the whole thing baffles me. I haven't changed, but you, God knows, you're almost like a stranger, talking some queer new language, looking at me as if there were some tremendous space between us. A month ago, it was you and I, and the world outside."

"Will you hear me?" she pleaded gently; and even at this moment of peculiar disturbance, it afforded him a distinct, dispassionate pleasure to listen to the high, sweet tones of that meandering voice.

Taking his silence for indulgence, she acknowledged it with a quivering smile.

"I look backward," she began with the sustained intonation which preludes a long story, "to see that this has always been, in a cant phrase, my fate. As a child, I remember looking down from our high nursery windows on the children, far below us under the railings of the park—vagrants, playing vagrant games, and even then I longed, I think, in a dreamy childish fashion to teach them prettier ways of play. That passed, and then at school in Paris, I used to wish I had the trick of helping wayward spirits, and girls can"—she explained with a little smile—"be wayward like their brothers, though they seem so tame. All this was latent, crude; I saw in it a sanctimonious trait, and tried to

check it. It passed, too, unrealised, a vague ideal or 'crank,' perhaps, and then when I left school we lived too fast for thought; it was a maze of parties and of people with not much room for actual life. It was, indeed, only a month ago that enlightenment and my summons came."

"Delivered," he asked sardonically, "by some sandy-haired parson in the North?"

"No; put straight into my hands by a hectic creature, as I was leaving Euston by the night mail."

"You don't mean to tell me that your sanity was shaken by a flimsy—tract?"

"If you put it that way, yes. It was flimsy, and I made it absently a marker for my book. That bored me and I read the leaflet through. It contained the usual mixture of sensationalism and inconsequence. It was vapid, hysterical, illogical, and yet it was my message, all the same."

"Then there you lost your balance? For God's sake don't; you know you're doing that; to leave your world, to cut adrift your people—me! We are bound to see the twist—but can't you see it? For a moment you lost your balance——"

"For a moment I did lose it, but it was not then and there I saw, was forced to see, my way." She paused, recalling, trying to frame the record of dark hours, and went on: "A struggle followed. A woman does not reject so lightly the obvious allurements of life; she cannot view loneliness, exile, age and its sequel so easily as that. The prospect was awful and bewildering—more so to me than it can seem to you; and for a time it stunned me. At first I could not face it, but conclusion came at length from some words I chanced upon one troubled night at random, and these struck deeper than the first incoherent call. 'Behold, I have set before thee an open door and no man can shut it. . . . Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.' I would even then have stopped my ears; I could not; I was haunted, shadowed by the phrase, 'no man can shut it'; there did not seem a hint of choice. Such crowns are sharp, press cruelly; indeed, though for myself, I see no shadow of one, I know they can wring blood from the brows that wear them. But it is not a crown I see at all, only an open door."

"Did nothing tell you," he persisted, in the manner of humouring a child, "that you were unaccountably possessed?"

"I was possessed," she admitted quietly. "Visible signs became obscure; invisible things grew curiously actual. The figures of the world retreated as though behind a screen; its voices were a distant babel; my own short life, and time—the

time of ages—seemed only a little while; love, even with your image in its eyes, a mortal toy. This did not last; it could not, it appalled me; yet”—the refrain was musical, mechanical—“it was my message all the same.”

“Briefly, you will pick your way to glory, and send me to the devil. That is the plain and vulgar fact. But if I say you shall not? Haven’t I the right to say it? Your first pledge was to me; calls and visions do not leave you honourably free to break it. I shall hold you to it. I shall fight, I warn you, Laurie, and stubbornly for my own——”

“I beseech you not.” She leaned towards him, borrowing from her soul a posture, an inflection of acute dismay.

The accent, the attitude was that of a child in terror-stricken prayer. Of old she had denied, resisted, never yet put forth a plea. This suppliancy of hers provoked in him a novel consciousness of passion, a dull sense of pity, moving him finally towards her spirit, forcing response to the spirit’s plea. To that appeal, some force outside himself, his individual need, his pain, and his perplexity, made answer.

“If I yield tamely,” he said at last, “it will make your wild way easier.”

“If you do not, you will break me.”

She seemed as he glanced down on her, half shattered now; so tireless and yet so weary, formidably frail.

“How?” he asked, not following her thought.

“I cannot explain. I simply feel that if your power stooped to roughness, it would snap me—like a twig.”

“Your whim—or what you call your purpose?”

“No; just myself.”

“You understand that you have broken me? That doesn’t seem to touch you.”

“But it does,” she cried, sweeping a hand across her eyes, “God knows and pities me, it does. It blinds, bewilders me.”

“Then you still care?”

“There is no ‘still’ in love,” she answered quietly.

“You are beyond me.” He grew harsh. “Dead or dying, as we uninspired people reckon life.”

“One does not die because—one suffers. Everything can kill—but pain——”

She found for this a slow and wavering smile which matched her utterance and provoked him by its difficult composure.

“I will make you live,” he broke out almost brutally and stopped. Her pallor startled him, her face of fear.

“God help us both,” he ended. It was more an imprecation

than a prayer. "I scare you, and you make me, somehow, half a fool and half a brute. The man that's left can't reach the woman in you. I suppose there's nothing more to say."

She held her hand out, groping that way towards pardon, but he left her quickly, his farewell spoken in the prosaic click of the closing door. Now she raised her eyes and held him in her gaze; now she laid her heart under his hand to throb its story. Vainly. She might keep him thus, would keep him, in the coming years, his presence never lost, her secret. But with him it would be different. If not present to his sense, his spirit would not feel her by. He would remember her in bitterness, or, losing bitterness, forget. Her old world she saw already in the dimness of the twilight, and the new gave yet no hint of dawn. Upon the space between them, blank and starless, she let fall a sudden rain of tears.

Stella found her sobbing quietly, still standing by the window at the end of the big empty room.

"This is not heroic, Laurie. Has Tony dragged you back to womanhood, reconverted you to common-sense?"

"He has gone in anger; justly cold. I have chilled every heart," she mused desolately, shivering at their cold contact.

"Because you will not let them warm you. You used to be so simple, now you have become a rather complex puzzle of which we can't fit in the parts, and if we could perhaps we shouldn't find the picture they produced convincing or attractive."

"Stella," the girl ventured suddenly, "do you not believe in—God?"

A shrug of the shoulders was to have served for answer, but the girl's face called from its clearing mists a glance so newly imperative, that Stella framed a verbal substitute.

"I have never disturbed myself to analyse anything so trivial as my 'belief.'"

"Then you cannot even partly understand."

"I don't aspire to. But in my metallic way, I give you credit for sincerity, and some misguided pluck; your distress distresses me, though not to the point of weakness."

"Oh," the poor child cried, as the mist gathered in her eyes again, "it is a wicked thing to say, but I wish, oh! how I wish, that some of us were weaker than we are!"

III.

LAURENCE and Lucy Moreton, the pretty typical evangelists, had shut the door upon the crowded room and found themselves on the dark stairs. The party, given by the students in their

honour, had been a jovial, rather noisy farewell feast, and Laurence found that to have seen the end of them was an immense relief. For they had jarred—not to-night only—no—for three almost intolerable years. They were so unmodulated, she thought wearily, not of her world at all—what Stella, who had seen them once, had called “betweens.”

The people of her world had jarred in other days—but differently. Their pose and twang was more familiar, lighter and less vehement. It was of vehemence and all the cant of small solemnities that she had grown so tired. Yet they had been, she hastened to remind herself, extremely kind. “Extremely kind.” The phrase suggested Lucy. Why did Lucy’s phrases always sound so ready-made? She turned to her and said abruptly:

“Do you know I am in the mood to fling up everything to-night?”

“That sounds like a whisper from the enemy,” returned the little enthusiast in her conventional pious fashion. “When you have had your call——”

“Oh!” said Laurence with a touch of irritation. “There are so many calls. How does one know, I wonder, if one has caught the real voice?”

But as she spoke, she felt her insincerity; had she not almost ceased to hear? Three years ago, viewed from afar, with all its sadness and its severance, what a romantic possibility her sacrifice had seemed. That picture had lost lustre, inspiration, and vitality; its tone to-night was an intolerable grey. And then repenting of the momentary petulance, she added—

“Perhaps it is as well that we are going out together; you see straighter and feel more simply than I ever shall. I suppose it is that I am tired—of—of people and exams. and tea parties, and all this week’s farewells. Good-night.”

And as she said it, she was conscious of being a little tired of Lucy too.

She hailed a hansom and was driven home.

Her soul had lost its footing; she knew that. It beat itself distractedly against a chill, dark air; peered helplessly into obscurity; listened with strained intentness for the still voice to speak again, imperatively, conclusively, as it had done before. Its obdurate silence silenced her; she was not able to send forth a cry. Where was the great Deliverer? Invisible, inaudible; another counsellor was near. “Reclaim your life,” it urged, “it is yours to keep and not to cast away.”

Yes, faith was assuredly failing her, and with it, power. Faith

will "remove mountains," but unfaith, to the spirit's vision, will remove them too.

Reaching her rooms, she turned the light on hastily. Oh! she must have light, if only this prosaic, unilluminative glare!

Stella and Lady Armitage were out: they seemed to be always out when she came in. Wherever they might be to-night, she wished herself with them. A hunger seized her, she felt starved; a hunger for the old irresponsible existence, the hum of futile conversation, for the "swish" of skirts, music, the odour of familiar essences—yet she had never liked perfumes; she sickened for them now, only because they might restore the sense of some extinguished fragrance in the air of life. Her own dress was redolent of smoke and chemicals; she went swiftly into the adjoining room and changed it for an evening gown. Coming back, she began to pace up and down the long, luxurious room. It painted the picture of the easy past in delicately brilliant tints, and all her chosen things were there. She began fingering them feverishly, the costly knick-knacks strewn about it, their contact bringing some tangible assuagement of her hardly comprehended pain.

She stood looking at her little gallery of water-colours, oddly, unsymmetrically hung; at the rich, unlooped curtains, and the shallow, velvet shelves, upon which rows of unframed photographs were tilted in long lines against the wall.

These portraits stared at her in merciless reminder of the barren present, a strange crew; authors and opera singers, known and unknowable celebrities, chance acquaintances, and friends. It had been early a marked trait of hers not to lose memory of faces which had pleased or spoken or impressively passed by; part of a keen and instinctive feeling that she must not let slip even the minor loveliness of life. Now they demanded its retention, challenged dismissal, joining their own to that persistent utterance which breathed "stay." The crowd of faces congregated round her, and from its midst emerged the one she shunned supremely; his whose, while her will remained, she must with the last remnant of it shut away. She could, she would not meet it, and her head dropped desperately down upon her hands.

An hour, two hours passed. She lay back listening for the sound of wheels in the deserted street below.

At length the clock chimed two; some minutes later she heard Stella's step ascend the stairs and travel past her door. Would sleep befriend her? Lately it had touched her eyes reluctantly, come loth, aversely, to a sleepless heart.

And speech? she wanted speech, but could not gain the hearing

of her own deaf spirit. Was Stella's deafer? She went swiftly out and made her way along the unlit passage to her sister's room.

Stella was lounging in an armchair by the fire. "Why are you up?" she inquired yawning. "I thought 'your holiness' retired at ten. I suppose you know your limits, but you are making a wreck—to be accurate, an exquisite wreck of yourself. Is it worth while?"

"If you mean my looks, what does it matter? Are they really gone?"

"Temporarily rubbed out. Of course it matters little to anybody, if not to you; but it reminds one for the millionth time of the proverbial irony of life. Now I, for instance, would sell my soul for your beauty, while you are placidly bartering your beauty for your soul."

"Not placidly; to-night I imagine both might be put up at a low figure."

"What's the matter? Has your visit to the menagerie brought on a headache? Did the inmates howl?"

"Not more than usual. Stella—I have lost my way."

"That is tragic, but not final; and as we regard it, scarcely news."

"You know what I mean," the girl said wretchedly. "It was foolish of me to come to you."

"If you want recuperative texts. I am religiously illiterate. Get Bennet to make you some coffee and go to bed."

"I know it's late, but would it bore you dreadfully if I stayed here a little while? Please don't scoff. I have a stupid dread of everything to-night; myself, my room, the world outside, the place I'm going to. You know we sail a week to-day."

"Sit down," said Stella. "Try the chair with the green cushions. Now I come to think of it, I don't see much of you. And is it really a week to-day? You strange unhappy child!"

Laurence pushed the chair aside, advanced and stood before her sister, looking down with burning, over-brilliant eyes which had absorbed all the vitality of the white face from which they shone.

"Stella, I must go on."

"But not to-night," said Stella quietly. "To-night you've stopped. That's obvious."

"To-morrow then. I—must—go—on."

"If that's the programme for to-morrow, you had better sleep to-night."

"I cannot sleep, or if I do, my dreams are ugly, haunted." She forced a smile and change of tone.

"That is a nice new frock of yours, one of Félise's inspirations? It seems ages since I saw Félise. Where have you been?"

"Must I exert myself to remember? There—and home, and—Oh, by the way, I met Tony somewhere. He is prepared to make a last attack. The news of your departure has disturbed him. He looks menacing and says ominously little. Isn't his tenacity commendable?"

"He must not come, you told him so."

"I imagined that to be your business. But, my dear, he will, and having waited all this time, he may be difficult to deal with."

"I know. I cannot see him."

"Tell him so."

"I cannot tell him—Stella." She threw her hands out. "If I give way—break down, what should you say?"

"That you have wasted a deplorable amount of energy and time. I should congratulate you with reservations; but unfortunately you will not 'give way.'"

The girl knelt down and with a dreary, childish exclamation, laid her head upon her sister's knee.

"I could go on," she stammered—"if—if there were anyone to pray for me. Not those people who are always praying." She flung off the vision of those "people" with a gesture almost petulant—"but someone—different; you, you know. I cannot; I have missed my way."

Stella drew off her gloves deliberately and put a hand upon the pale, soft hair. Her voice struck hard on her own ear in her attempt to soften it.

"Failing—er—intercession," she said presently, "I must substitute coffee."

And she got up to ring the bell.

IV.

"I HEARD you were leaving England, and I came to say good-bye."

It was an unconsidered speech and Anthony Gurney stammered over it; it was not what he had come to say. The words were wrung from him; they broke baldly upon a silence, which to his sense struck passion dumb; a stillness unresponsive, mute as death, which like death's delicate presence seemed to pervade the room.

The girl before him held this silence in her eyes, it clung to her pale lips, and lay upon her white, impassive brow.

He could hardly identify this presentment of her with that of

the actual being who was to have been his wife. She faced him like the wraith of one whom he had thought to meet in flesh, but met, in fact, remote from it, under the aspect of an unexpected apparition; and he shrank from the strange encounter as the living shrink from death.

She had said once—the phrase was lodged in memory—"if your power stoops to roughness, it will break me"; and it was with this intent that he had come, only to find her unassailable, walled round by this fine silence, and guarded by a serenity which seemed not to belong to any world of his.

He waited, with unaccustomed patience, for her reply.

It came slowly; it sounded slow, even from that retarded voice: the cold prosaic utterance cut through him like a remembered thrust of steel.

"Yes, we are sailing in a day or two; it was kind of you to think of me."

Was this, she wondered, what he had come to say? Was it against this colourless "Good-bye" that she had fought so many nights—so many nights?

The haggard hours reappeared, took shape in thought to mock her baseless fear. She might have spared herself that struggle in which she seemed to have spilt her spirit's blood.

It was his moment, had he known it, for revolt against the vainness of victory that had brought her to the verge of a supreme defeat.

A breath of passion would have blown her towards him, swept the fluttering leaf into his hand, but there was something in her distant gaze, her parted presence which forced him, for the moment, to suspend that breath.

A band struck up in the street outside; he listened relievedly to its gasping delivery of a familiar air; the brazen wail restored him grotesquely to external life, recalled the social exigencies of the moment.

"I suppose you will wear the native costume," he ventured aimlessly, at length; "it ought to suit you, though you are so fair."

"Yes, I suppose I shall in time; they say the people take more kindly to one, if one does."

"They will take kindly to you, anyhow. You know"—he smiled mechanically, he seemed to be babbling like a marionette—"you have a charm."

"I had," she admitted simply, "but Stella tells me it is growing 'beautifully less.'"

"A sisterly mistake." He felt himself becoming momentarily more vapid. "How is she?"

"As usual; very robust and very gay."

It occurred to him how often he saw Stella, how in the future he would still be seeing Stella; that carefully draped and tinted personality, so uninteresting, noticeable only as a perpetual reminder of this other woman, now tangible, and near, but soon to be remote and irreclaimable.

An assertive impulse seized him. He must crash through the numbing stillness of her presence, defy it and dispel it. But he had missed his moment, it was passed. The empty common-places which they had just exchanged had steadied her, and feeling a frail security, she kept it when, after a pause, he attacked it with—

"I did not come to talk inanities. We are not dummies. Let us be human. I had better tell you what I really came to say."

"No!" she said, summoning a coldness which seemed to be for her like death to desperate creatures, waiting within call, "not if it is something which I cannot hear."

"But you must hear it."

His hard insistency struck like a blow against her clear reluctant voice.

"You came to say good-bye."

She found a smile, held out her hand with a conclusive gesture of dismissal, adding, "Forgive me, I have nothing else to say."

He felt the flavour of an oath upon his tongue, the dust and smoke of failure flung into his eyes; a faint sweet bugle sounded his retreat, but ere he made it, he advanced a step.

"I have a right to ask one question. Are you happy?"

Her frame, her spirit seemed suddenly stung, then frozen to torpor by a rush of ice-like air.

Her lips were stiffened by it, but she moved them. "Absolutely happy."

He accepted it and she was left alone.

V.

THE door had just closed upon Lady Armitage's impressive figure, clad in sumptuous mourning, an orthodox embodiment of maternal grief. Her temporary absence appeared to Stella in the light of one of life's remaining mercies; she got up and crossed the room.

She caught her own reflection in one of the long mirrors. No, she had never looked, she never would look, even passable in black.

She paused to take note of the new lines with which the last few weeks had marked her face. They did not alter it materially, how should they? Hers was not a face—the knowledge had ceased to sting her—which sorrow or even time could mar. She was not old, and yet she would never be young again. Life was not thrilling, it never had been that; but it was no longer mildly entertaining; and she surveyed the prospective length of it; it seemed so long, she thought, before one might reasonably expect to die.

But this was sheer morbidity. She shook it off and went towards the window, looking out. The carriage was below; she watched her mother enter it and, after some fussy directions, drive away. The great room seemed intolerably empty; and yet this view of it was hardly new. Laurence must long have left a void, only she had not fully realised it before. In her cold and curious fashion, she had missed the child—she always thought of Laurence as “the child”—and now the child was—where?

She left the window and sat down at a littered davenport, taking from a drawer some covered sheets and a telegraphic envelope. There was no need to re-read them; every line was painfully familiar; first the pink message, curt and callously official: “Laurence Armitage massacred, with others; will send particulars,” and above it, the comic, unpronounceable foreign name of the place from which it was despatched.

She put it down; the words had been so horrible, so startling, a few weeks ago, and this afternoon they were a commonplace, accustomed aspect, like the ordinary delivery of news one might naturally expect to hear.

“Laurence Armitage”—Laurie, yes; she was going back upon her first stunned reception of the bald announcement; that *was* her sister’s name.

The door opened. “Captain Gurney” was announced. She held out a hand to the advancing figure, but did not rise.

“Please sit down,” she said. “Mamma had to go out. I am to offer profuse apologies, and you must accept them, as I did not tell her till the last moment that I was expecting you.”

“Thank you.” His relief was frank. “I should have come, but not—so soon. You sent for me?”

She took up the papers. “There is something that you will like to have. I wished to give it you myself. It seems that she”—love and death make definite and sufficient a bare pronoun—“she wrote a fragmentary note to you. I have it here.”

Without replying, he put out his hand for it.

"Perhaps you will read this first," she suggested, offering him a more closely-written page. "It comes from Miss Moreton—the girl who went out with her—was with her. I wrote to ask for some remembrances of—of Laurie, and she has kindly and promptly sent me this. It has the twang, but one need not be critical; the girl was evidently fond of—her."

He took the proffered sheet and read it through. It was headed by the tragic semi-farcical foreign name.

"'Dear Miss Armitage,' it began, 'as you have asked me, I will write all I can remember about our dear sister who is now—one cannot but rejoice to know—with God. I need not repeat details of the terrible catastrophe; you will be only too familiar with them by now. Some days before the dreadful—yet in a sense, blessed—morning, we had been warned to keep inside the gates—it was considered safer; but she was nursing a little native boy in one of the huts outside, and it seemed impossible to keep her from what she felt she had to do. She was always splendidly brave and fearless, and death came to her in the Master's service. I believe now she must have known she had to suffer it for His sake. We saved ourselves; she seemed to have no self to save. She was truly "faithful unto death," and Christ has given her a "crown of life."

"'We feel we have lost less a comrade than a light, for His light shone through her. Her spirit seemed a torch which did not flicker and could not fail. She sat often silent, while we chattered, but her presence was so illuminating we hardly missed her speech. I fancy she thought we "gushed" a little, and I once asked her if that were so. "Ah," she said, "you think me cold, but am I so critical? I hoped I had got over that. I try, in my most wayward moments, to remember that we are all warming our hearts at the same fire."

"'Her beauty made a great impression on the people; it was an earthly gift, which she was permitted to make use of in the heavenly work. She promised extraordinary power, and we imagined a great future for her, not knowing it was to be greater than any we foresaw. "The Master is come and calleth for thee." She went willingly at that call. Latterly, her health showed signs of failing, and we urged rest upon her, but she would not take it. She did not spare herself or seem to set any value upon her life. They say, at the last, she might have saved herself, but would not—did not seem to care. We were speaking once of memories and she said, "My sweetest memory in heaven would be of some soul on earth that I had saved." But the Master did not give her time to work for Him. He had appointed her to

die. "Dear in the sight of the Lord is the death of His Saints." They met it gladly; it could not touch them, for they had pre-conquered death.

"I think I have told you all I can remember. She said very little; it was only with the people that her reticence took flight. Accept my sympathy in your great sorrow; our tears for her, for all of them, are triumph; even our mourning strikes a note of joy, and that it may be blessed to all of us is the fervent prayer of—
Yours sincerely, LUOY MORETON."

He returned the letter without comment. "May I have the—the note you spoke of? It may be an answer to a cowardly appeal I sent; how long it seems! and yet it is not more than a few weeks ago."

"You must forgive me," Stella explained, "for looking through it, not noticing at first that it was obviously meant for you."

His glance fell on the page of foreign note which she held out to him; he looked for a moment stupidly at the characters of the clear, decorative hand. The light was retreating, leaving the room to twilight. Stella lit two candles, and placed them on the table, but he went towards the window, preferring distance and a dimmer light. While he stood there, she sat steeped in the heavy silence, staring at the steady cones of flame.

The roll of wheels outside, monotonously audible, seemed, as he read, to rumble in his brain.

The letter started without preface and evidenced haste or agitation; it was undated and began: "Your note, this morning, lies in pieces upon my table. It is one I could not keep. It seems as if my old life were in shreds, unreadable as that. I think it is. I have not answered you before, because I could not; I felt weak and faltering and distracted; now something tells me that I must. Why do you tempt me to unfaithfulness so late? You force me, almost cruelly, to turn to you, but if I turn, it is only for a moment and with my body not my soul. If I come back to you—you say I must—I must be sent, as I was sent away from you, by some diviner voice, and that, I cannot hear. I have lost hearing. Once before I lost it, but it came back; it will come back again. I wait. I am alone. I suffer too. Love means so much beyond what we call joy. You say—you cannot mean it? that my 'sanctity' as you call it, is purchased by your ruin. Is that true? The thought is terrible. It has bewildered me. Once, as I told you, I saw simply 'an open door.' I went, or seemed to go, straight through it. But now you have confused my sight. I see two doors; one leads to you and one beyond you, but towards which the divine finger points, I cannot see. I wait for that; a

sign—a vision of my way. Be patient, gentler with me. I need patience too. I have my moments also of rebellion and despair. The sense of what I have made you suffer seems more than I can bear. Forgive me, for my life is not my own. The very tears that fall upon this paper seem not to belong to me. Will you be patient? Soon, certainly, clearly I shall see. I seem upon the verge of dawn—not far from some conclusive light. When once my path is plain I shall not waver; I shall go through it, when I find my door. I know you do not understand, but wait, with me—for me, perhaps. I send——”

It bore no signature; broke off abruptly; ended there. He folded it, and turned to Stella, holding the paper loosely in his hand. They faced in silence, two dark figures in the darkening room. After a long oppressive pause he came towards her and stood looking down upon the upturned unlovely face, thrown into pale and almost startling prominence by the two tall candles, between which he peered. His was in shadow, only faintly illumined by them, and as she saw it, it looked grey.

“She would have come back—to me,” was his first heavy utterance. It seemed so idle Stella passed it by. But he returned to it. “You don’t suppose,” he urged, with desperate persistence, “that she wasn’t coming back to me?”

He was used to Stella’s unresponsiveness; he took her silence now for acquiescence and went on.

“I feel a clod; incapable of thought, incapable of pain. What are you thinking?”

“Not of what you made her suffer; for God, I take it, loved her better and He made her suffer even more. I was thinking,” she answered, with a new note of tenderness, “of wasted love—and life. And of that ‘sweetest memory’ of hers denied. It seems hard she should have missed the thing she gave her life to gain.”

“But you are rational; you of all people don’t believe in ‘souls’ and ‘salvation’ and the rest.”

“I believe in saints. I did not. But I have thought just lately that this—what can one call it?—awful sacrifice, should make of one either a thorough infidel or a thorough Christian. Most of us halt contemptibly between the two.”

“I didn’t know you were that sort. I have never gone in for that kind of thing at all.”

“Nor I,” she said quietly, “till now. But this last week it has occurred to me—I don’t know why I tell you—what if that ‘sweetest memory’ of hers—you see how the phrase sticks—what if the soul she wanted for remembrance and did not live—but perhaps died to save—were—mine?”

"Good God!" he cried, "surely this ghastly tragedy has turned you sick. You are not acquiescing in it, preparing to profit by it in some strained, unnatural way?"

"If I did, don't you see, it would be her doing and not mine; her way of coming back and talking over things, of making me share now what in the past I would not share. I should be glad, I think, if things turned out that way."

A strange antagonism seized him. What if, after all, the dead *had* memories? If she should have a memory—the right to that was his, not Stella's—nobody's but his.

"Pull yourself together," he urged roughly. "You are getting touched by—by——"

"By the poor child's madness," she finished for him. "I think not."

He turned to go, turned back again, and faced her with a new insistence.

"Don't take it that way—any way but that! But no, you don't, you can't take it—that way."

She moved towards the window and the twilight.

"It's too soon—too strange. I do not know."

CHARLOTTE M. MEW.



A Shadow, with Bright Hair.

HALF-WAY up the cliff, in the shadow of a red rock, two men and a girl looked out on a dazzling sea as it broke in green crystal on the white beach below; one man sitting beside her on a boulder in ungainly fashion, his hands clasping his knees, and his eyes more often on the girl than on the sea; the other man lying on his back at her feet, his arms under his head, his eyes closed, his whole attitude one of lazy content.

"London," he was saying, "is a prison where they hang pretty things on the walls to distract people's minds from the prison. Some minds are so distracted; mine is not."

"Then why stay there?" asked the man on the boulder.

"I don't. Have I not escaped hither to the magic west? From the Orkneys to the Lizard, from Horn Head to Portland Bill, all is enchanted land and sea; the whole west borders the undiscovered country; Avalon, the Blessed Isles—all are here."

"Do you find the hotel comfortable, Owen?" inquired the girl.

"Thank you, Charlotte, I have not gone there. I discovered that Dowling had established himself in a picturesque little shanty just below here, almost on the beach—you can see the thatched roof if you look to the right—and I propose to share it with him. The owner dispenses tea and hot lobster to tourists, doubtless with the praiseworthy motive of thinning the population. That he should expect payment for the meal strikes me as grim humour, like Charon demanding his obolus."

"The meal is all right if you take whiskey and water with the lobster instead of tea," said Dowling.

"Or if you take the whiskey and water without the lobster. Well, Charlotte, I have a little chamber there facing the east, and I feel like Bunyan's Pilgrim."

"I am sure you don't," observed Dowling from his boulder.

"Then Charlotte shall be my spiritual guide and instruct me in the 'Pilgrim's Progress.'"

The girl smiled and shook her head. "I do not think I remember much about it," she said frankly.

"Why, how long ago is it since you read the book?"

"Oh, I never read it. I once heard a lecture upon it."

"Of course," murmured her cousin, "I might have known. People do not read the books of the giants nowadays, they hear lectures upon them. What did the monster say? The lecturer, I mean."

"He made an analysis of Bunyan's works."

"I'll bet he had never read one of them. Shade of the immortal tinker! Has the Pilgrim lived to be analysed? Somebody ought to have kicked the lecturer."

"I took notes at the time, but lost them. I really forget exactly what he said."

"That is quite right," approvingly; "always forget what a lecturer says. It is the next best thing to not listening at all."

"Everyone said he was a very clever man."

"My dear Charlotte, did you ever read the story of 'The Emperor's New Clothes'? Modern cleverness is the Emperor's new clothes." And the speaker closed his eyes again.

"Take no notice of him, Miss Winter," interposed Dowling. "Kenyon is perpetually growling. Leave him to the soothing influences of this gentle coast."

Kenyon opened his eyes. "'Gentle,' do you call it? 'Soothing?' I tell you, Dowling, this coast is Phoenician. They came here and remained, bringing their evil worship and their gorgeous life. Look at that jewel sea, glittering with changing colour like the covering of the King of Tyre; dyed Tyrian purple beyond the belt of emerald, passing into darkest sapphire, with gleams of beryl and diamond flash. Turn your eyes landward, and you have Baal-worship writ large on every tor."

"Sea and land were here before the Phoenicians," said Dowling.

"Through the history of this far-western seaboard," continued Kenyon, ignoring the interruption, "runs the glitter of gems, and over it broods the darkness of treacherous crime. King Mark of Cornwall was a decadent Phoenician. A Phoenician of the finest was the lady who presided at that hunting party on the moors, and later stabbed her step-son in the back—the back, you will observe—at Corfe Castle. Who lured ships on the rocks? More Phoenicians. Who kept back the blue ring? Who slew a helpless man for a green one? 'What! will the line stretch out to the crack of doom?'"

"Anyway, the decadent Phoenicians managed to settle the Armada, winds and waves aiding."

"Oh, the Phoenicians could fight; witness the Carthaginians, who were a Tyrian colony. Besides, there is a mixture of race here as elsewhere—Briton, Dane, Roman." He picked up a fragment of rock lying by his hand. "Marble, of course; pinkish-red. Those old Phoenicians knew how to use the splendid materials scattered at their feet. They built palaces of marble with windows of agate. We respectfully polish a few pebbles, vaguely gaze upon them in museums, and live ourselves in—I refrain from describing our present-day dwellings."

"I see nothing the matter with our dwellings, Owen," said his cousin. "Come for a row. There are delightful little boats down on the beach."

"This evening, Charlotte, I will row you to the enchanted isles if you wish. But only grasshoppers and maniacs disport themselves at high noon."

Dowling rose briskly from his boulder. "You stay here, Kenyon, and continue your meditations on old Hiram's coat, while I row Miss Winter round the Point. We will land there, listen to the Phoenician band on the Tyrian pier, and then row back again. Would you like that?" turning to the girl.

"Very much indeed, thank you," springing to her feet; "Owen is laziness itself."

"What you call laziness," protested the culprit, "is merely another form of energy; and I could not be taken to a pier. It would be like dragging a dog past the band; I should sit down and howl."

"Good-bye," responded his cousin. "Shall you be here when we come back?"

"That depends on when you return. But if I have vanished, I shall appear at lunch."

He raised himself on his elbow and watched them descend to the beach, then took up a book beside him, and settled himself to read.

Two hours later Kenyon strolled into the verandah of his aunt's house.

"Where is Charlotte?" asked Mrs. Winter, glancing up from a letter.

"Gone for a row with Dowling," Owen replied, dropping into a chair.

"Why did you not go with them?"

"Why should I?"

"Because you are engaged to Charlotte."

"That is a strong reason for not wearying her with my society. She will have so much of it by-and-by."

"I wish you would see things in a proper light, Owen. Being aunt to both of you, I feel a great responsibility, especially as Charlotte has neither father nor mother to look after her. I shall speak seriously to her."

"My dear aunt, I beg you will do nothing of the kind. Let the girl have a little freedom. She has been told she would marry me ever since she can recollect anything. Do not make our engagement resemble the stone people hang round a kitten's neck before they drown it."

"But why not be married this summer?"

"Where is the hurry? When Charlotte wishes to marry me I am quite ready."

"I do not approve of long engagements; and Charlotte has money."

"So have I."

"Oh, I did not mean that Charlotte's money was of any great consequence to you; of course not, you have enough. But it seems best to keep it in the family. Suppose she slips through your fingers? I wish you would stay here instead of on the cliff."

Kenyon shook his head. "My erratic habits would distract you. I like to wander in the small hours as De Quincey did. You would mistake my departing footsteps for those of an arriving burglar. Here come Charlotte and Dowling. Ask him to lunch, won't you?"

"I do not know anything about his family. He is in the civil service, I believe, but that is nothing nowadays. One is told the postman is in the civil service."

"His family is all right, and so is he. He sits under a palm tree like Deborah, and judges the disorderly sons of Shem. I will answer for him."

The advancing two were apparently in the highest spirits, and Mrs. Winter regarded them with disapproval in her heart. Yet, after all, she reflected, there was no need for her to feel perturbed. Robert Dowling was really extremely pleasant, and if Owen would not exert himself to look after his future wife, why should she, their aunt, harass her mind concerning the matter? So Dowling was invited to lunch, and spent the afternoon on the verandah, teaching Charlotte's dog a new trick. Moreover, he contrived so to ingratiate himself with the elder lady that he stayed to dinner; and the tardy noon, now past the full, had risen from the sea before he and Kenyon left Mrs. Winter's pretty lamp-lit drawing-room for the mysterious gloom and sheen of the world outside.

The night was so still as to seem almost unreal, a vision of phantasmal loveliness. Not the faintest breath of wind stirred in bush or tree; the leaves, glistening in the moon-flood, cast motionless shadows of dark jade. From the unseen foot of the cliff to the dim horizon, stretched the vast plain of heaving water, in colour dusky hyacinth, crossed by a shining ripple of moonbeams. Against the violet blue of the sky, the rocks, vivid crimson by day, showed dull purple, glowing to sullen red where the light smote them. All was silent as a dream, save for the rustle and hiss of the unsleeping sea far below.

"Hear the Midgard Serpent!" said Kenyon as they descended the steep and winding path. "In this place one understands that old myth; one comprehends how it arose."

"Yes," assented Dowling, "the sound is rather curious at this height." He looked seaward, and added—"I'll have a good swim from a boat to-morrow."

"Oh, thou prosaic!"——and Kenyon laughed.

"Why, you swim yourself, and well too. What's the matter?"

"Nothing. Merely the destruction of a spider-web of thought. Here is our hut. Blessed fairyland where no doors are locked!"

The cottage where they lodged so overhung the sea that from the window of the little sitting-room a pebble could be dropped into the line of foam glimmering on the beach. Dowling lit a candle and rummaged in a cupboard, while Kenyon leant out over the sill, and wanted to know why they had come indoors at all.

"On such a night, in such a place," said he, "anything might happen. That dim headland, is it the shore of Troy, or the isle of Morgan le Fay?"

"A thousand fantasies
Begin to throng into my memory,
Of calling shapes and beck'ning shadows dire,
And airy tongues that syllable men's names
On sands and shores. . . ."

"We came in for a drink, for one thing," replied Dowling, "and I don't intend to go out again to-night, it's getting late. Where is the soda-water? Oh, I see. Here, help yourself." He sat down near the window. "Yes, it is a lovely night. By the way, I am greatly indebted to Mrs. Winter for the day I have spent."

"I will tell her so. She will be quite ready to give you more such days if you like."

Silence for a few minutes. Kenyon moved away to the table, and Dowling stared out of the window, his elbow on the sill.

"You are an uncommonly lucky fellow," he said suddenly.

"Wherefore this conviction of my luck—not that I deny it."

"I should think not! Your luck is stupendous. Just look at things all round."

"I do look at them, and I admit that I find life fairly satisfactory."

"Fairly!" snorted Dowling.

"Even so. The expression is accurate. There is a certain flatness about our ultra-civilisation. Who would not be Faust, to call up Helen of Troy?"

"He didn't."

"Well, never mind. We will suppose that he did see 'the face that launched a thousand ships, and burned the topless towers of Ilium.' Then, coming to our own land, to this very coast, how about Morgan le Fay? We do not hear that she was beautiful, but she must have possessed a strange attraction. Like Hemison, I would fain speak with Morgan le Fay, even though 'deep draughts of death draw nigh my heart.'"

"Why, you ungrateful dog! Here is a charming girl, as good as gold, and as pretty as she is good, ready to marry you, and you are sighing like a furnace over the memory of worthless shadows."

"I am positive they both existed."

"They are shadows now, anyway."

"Shadows that yet stir men's hearts."

"Oh, look here," Dowling got up and searched in the cupboard again, "you need a tonic. This is a liqueur that is warranted to perform miracles of healing. Brown sent it to me from that out-of-the-way place where he is consul, you know. He says it was given to him. My opinion is that he stole it. No sane man would give such stuff away except in his last will and testament. Try it."

"Certainly Brown stole it," Kenyon agreed, after trying the liqueur. "It's a miracle in itself, no matter what its effects may be."

"As for your shadows," resumed Dowling, "they suited the time in which they lived, but assuming that it were possible for you to call up Helen of Troy——"

"Say Morgan. There is a greater witchery in Morgan le Fay. Helen is carried off as a prize, like a beautiful slave. Morgan is no slave. She is a Circe; she has her kingdom; she ensnares and rules."

"Morgan be it, then. Personally I should prefer Helen, as being better looking and better tempered. However, I was about

to observe that the idea of either Helen or Morgan le Fay as the mother of a family fairly makes one's brain spin."

"Talking to you, Dowling, is like being patted on the nose with a brick. Did not Werther's Charlotte go on cutting bread and butter? Alas! my Charlotte will always cut me bread and butter."

"And very wholesome for you; exactly what you need, my son. I admire Miss Winter. In fact I am strongly inclined to cut you out and marry her myself, if she will have me."

"You?" Kenyon looked genuinely amused.

"Yes, I myself, Robert Dowling. I should make her a better husband than you will, our tastes are similar. And after all, you have told me the engagement is a family arrangement. I should like to upset it."

"Well, of all the cool——" and Kenyon burst out laughing:

"I am honestly telling you my views."

"Quite so," Kenyon's mirth increased. "My dear fellow, you are adding a deal of interest to the arrangement, and I am grateful. If my cousin prefers you to me, I shall step aside with my usual urbanity, but she has not yet said so."

"I ought to apologize, I suppose."

"Not at all. I am no ogre. Charlotte is free to change her mind if she wishes, and the situation now really interests me. I had no idea it was so triangular."

"I did not intend to say so much, but when you talked of Helen, and bread and butter, and Morgan le Fay, why——"

"I see. I ran up against your feelings; though Morgan haunted the imagination of Europe for centuries, and even now is said to appear occasionally."

"Ah!" Dowling leant back in his chair and contemplated the ceiling with an expression of subdued derision. "'Ghosts may come and ghosts may go, But I scoff on for ever!'"

"She was seen in Ireland a hundred years ago," Kenyon went on, "and the fishermen hereabouts say she walks here at times, and her presence foretells disaster."

"Stuff! I'll tell you something better than that, something real too. The garrulous old skipper who sits every evening at the top of the cliff declares there are green dawns here. I told him I had seen one in Egypt, but never elsewhere."

"Green dawns here? Impossible!"

"He sticks to it, though, and I am inclined to believe him. He says the green light comes before sunrise, which it does, you know."

"What time of year?"

"Summer, of course. This time of year, during great heat, accompanied by extreme clearness of atmosphere. When these conditions are fulfilled, then comes a green dawn."

"Well the weather is hot enough and clear enough now. I think I will sit up and see what happens."

"Better go to bed and chance it, as I shall. Good-night."

Left alone, Kenyon took up a book, but presently fell asleep, lulled by the soft, stealthy, ceaseless rustle of the sea beneath the window. The candle guttered and went out, the book dropped from his hand, and he slept on in the darkness of the room with the wonderful luminous night outside. The minutes passed as the stars swung round, till the Bear stood on the northern horizon, and Owen awoke with a start to find the magic of the world had changed. The moonlight still lay on the beach and lit the foam, but its colour was not the white dazzle of the depths of the night; eastward the sky was paling, and the voice of the sea was hushed to a whisper that was well-nigh silence.

"The dawn!" he said. "Now, what colour will it be? I should see it better from the high cliff. Time enough to rouse Dowling if it does prove green."

He went out quietly, closing the door behind him, and took a steep path to the left, a path that led above the cottage and was in many places only a narrow shelf. As he walked onward and upward, around him spread the blue light of dawn. Waking birds fluttered out of the rose-bushes and tangles of clematis that, grey with dew, clung in every nook and cranny. The light grew as Kenyon mounted higher. Was it blue? Surely it was changing as all things became clearer? He stopped on a rocky ledge and looked seaward. Still the light grew, changing, waxing stronger, and lo! the dawn was green as a laurel leaf held against the sun, green as an emerald! Far below, on the cottage roof, the moonlight shone like spilt gold in the strange radiance. All the air was filled with that green effulgence, a light of a wondrous quality, shadowless, jewel-like, soft, yet brilliant; and it seemed to Kenyon as though he stood in the heart of an emerald.

"Incredible!" he ejaculated. "Most marvellous and incredible!"

"Why incredible?" asked a voice of singular richness and clearness, that sounded as if it came from an infinite distance, yet was close in his ear. He turned in surprise to see, standing beside him on the narrow path, a woman in long flowing garments green as the dawn, and with hair the colour of the gold moonlight. Where had Kenyon seen that face, with its

wonderful transparency of complexion, the faint rose tint seeming to flicker and die, and flicker again as the light flame flickers in a nacrous shell? He could not recall those unfathomable eyes that met his with a look at once mocking and grave. Ah, he remembered now. These were the features of that strange marble called the Bust of Elche; the lines not beautiful—not—he checked the thought, still gazing. There were types of beauty other than the Greek, and here was one totally dissimilar, yet perfectly harmonious and possessing an attraction all its own. Was not the Bust of Elche beautiful? Elche? Of what race was the woman of Elche? Of what race the woman before him, standing massively calm, silently imperious, green-robed in the green dawn? Surely she was allied to that long-passed people whose embroidered sails once caught the sunrise off these shores?

“Why incredible?” she asked again. “It is not so incredible as the folly of men. You might have the peace of earth and heaven, but you destroy the one and throw away the other.”

“Doubtless I spoke foolishly,” said Kenyon. “I imagined myself alone.” And he looked the curiosity he dared not express.

She answered the look rather than the words. “You have your wish. Do you accept the risk?”

“Yes, a thousand times yes!” he cried, recalling and repeating the words he had uttered the previous night. “What care I for deep draughts of death, if I may but speak with Morgan le Fay?”

He felt no astonishment. He seemed to have known it from the first. He had reached a point where the illusion of time had vanished, and life was one and indivisible. Also, with sudden intuition, he comprehended her who once was Morgan le Fay. Despite her northern fairness, her British birth, her soul had swung back through the centuries to some ancestral Baal-worshipper even as her face wore the lines of his. Kenyon could have fancied the men of that race, strong, unscrupulous, evil, crowding dimly behind her; fierce shadows pointing, whispering, “She is of us—of us!” Yet not wholly of them; there was a subtle difference, the Christian leaven working.

She made no reply to Kenyon's eager protest, but on her lips and in her eyes, a faint half-mocking smile mingled with the impassive calm as she spoke again of the marvel of that hour before sunrise.

“Such glory of light would not have been strange to the men of the past. They noted these dawns and recorded them; has any man of the present done so? You are in danger of losing

the wisdom bequeathed by the dead, while you are reviving their follies and their crimes."

"There is no defence," said Kenyon. "I admit it all. A terrible wave of atavism is sweeping over us; we are becoming positively simian! Yet what can we do? Our world is falling about our ears, the noise of ruin deafens us, the very ground is hot under our feet, and like the bears, we must keep dancing, or whirl, moth-like, into a burning lamp."

"Forgetting the moonlight and the stars. What good remembrance is there in the burning?"

"None, but we have no memory nowadays, and there is the excitement of dodging the flame. After all, the whirling round that brilliant warmth and the subsequent speedy frizzle may be as satisfactory as long safe flights and broken-winged old age."

"Old age is not necessarily broken-winged, nor does it come to all."

"Perhaps not. We moderns, however, are not the only fire-worshippers. That whirling round the lamp has been a recognised occupation of mankind from the earliest ages. Moths were always numerous."

"Yes, they were," she said, looking seaward with brooding introspective gaze.

A faded yellow leaf fluttered down from a cranny to her feet, and Kenyon pointed to it.

"Sir Dinar returns!"

"That Sir Dinar?" She picked up the leaf. "I will give him as guerdon to a fisherman. Come!"

The dawn was green as ever as they walked along the cliff path, a greenness not to be described, more luminous than emerald, a colour that was pure light. Far below on the cottage roof the moonlight still lay like spilt gold. Afterwards Kenyon marvelled at his own sure-footedness on that narrow ledge where there seemed barely space for one, with a sheer drop of five hundred feet to the beach; but now in the wonderful dawn he walked securely beside his companion, listening as she spoke of many things, conscious only of her presence. Was it the sea rustling in his ears, or the rustling of the green garments of Morgan le Fay? But the apparently heavy folds seemed to float along the path as though weightless.

"The dawn has changed," she said. "Let us go down to the beach."

He looked round in surprise; no longer was the world one vast emerald. The green light was gone, the yellow moonlight gone

also ; earth and sea were white-gold, and the dazzling rim of the sun rose above the sea-line.

"You ask what are our aims," he was saying. "Oh, we have none. But give us credit for one virtue, that of meekness. No generation has been so belaboured as ours, and the harder the blows are laid on the more we throw ashes on our heads and proclaim the beating just. Yet sometimes I venture to doubt the justice."

"Then why throw the ashes? Is it that you have no convictions, only moods? Truly the veil is thickening over the face of all nations." She glanced at him and smiled, a smile swift as summer lightning. "You feel surprise that I should speak thus, but in the long centuries one grows very wise—for others. I myself must needs remain unchanged."

"Who would desire change?" cried Kenyon.

"I myself. But for some there is no place of repentance."

They had reached the bottom of the cliff, where a little boat was rocking on the shingle.

"Row me across," she said.

"To Avalon?"

"Not yet. Row me now to the landing-place yonder across the bay."

To Kenyon the time of that crossing seemed at once brief as a moment, yet age-long. Did he row? Or did he rest on his oars and let the current drift the boat whither she desired? He never knew. And always he looked upon the face of Morgan le Fay, the face of the marble of Elche; while the sun rose higher and the sea took colour from the day. The terrible women of old, Tomyris, Jezebel, Nitocris, did they wear these features of the vanished race? Were they so fair? But the woman before him differed from these in that she had been born Christian: therefore more complicated, less of the animal, knowing the evil of evil, with finer lines of thought on cheek and brow, yet still the face of the Elche marble. She turned her head to look at a solitary figure on the approaching shore.

"There is our fisherman." She opened her hand and showed the yellow leaf lying on her palm, adding, with subtle mockery of glance and voice, "And here is Sir Dinar for him!"

"Let me row back?" pleaded Kenyon.

"It grows too late, from sunset to sunrise is my hour."

"I will row till we meet the sunset again."

As he spoke the boat grated on the pebbles, a few yards from where a young fisherman was standing. Kenyon sprang out, throwing his shadow, a transparent shadow of dawn, on the beach

before him. He turned to assist his companion; she already stood beside him, but before her lay no shadow. The fisherman, who had put out a hand to steady the boat, drew back with a scared face.

"You look in vain for my shadow," she said, addressing Kenyon. "I myself am a shadow."

"Near you," he replied recklessly, "all things become shadows."

She held out the yellow leaf to the fisherman, but he made no movement, and she threw the leaf into the bottom of the boat where it seemed to fall more heavily than a leaf falls; then walked up the sloping beach with Kenyon.

"I myself," she repeated, with that indescribable look of mingled mockery and darkly brooding thought, "am a shadow. Remember, and forget."

For a moment more Kenyon saw her standing by him, the pale gold of the new-risen sun on the deeper gold of her hair, the emerald green of her garments; saw the flickering colour, like a light flame, coming and going in the lucent fairness of her face, that face of the bust of Elche. Then—he gazed at empty air; There was no one, nothing between him and the cliff that rose skyward sixty yards away. He gasped, stared round wildly, vaguely. He was alone save for the fisherman, who still stood by the boat. Kenyon hurried down to him.

"That lady gave you a leaf. I will buy it from you."

The man pointed to the boat.

"'Tis there," he said. "You'm welcome to it, but witch-money's best thrown back in the sea."

"Why, it is gold!" picking up the leaf. "Pure gold, quite soft. Feel it!"

But the fisherman declined to handle the mysterious thing.

"Well, I'll give you two pounds for it." And Kenyon produced a couple of sovereigns, which were received with surprised thanks and friendly advice.

"If I was you, sir, I'd be a bit careful for a day or two. I've heard that when the lady's seen, there's trouble to come."

"How often is she seen?"

The man rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "I've heard my grandfather say he see her once, over to Motcombe, forty year back."

Kenyon would have questioned further, but at that moment Dowling hailed him from the top of the cliff, so, telling the man he would see him again later, Owen went up the steep cliff road.

"Did you see the green dawn?" asked Dowling as they met.

"Oh, was that real?"

"Real? Of course it was! Did you think I had turned on the limelight?"

"No," slowly, "I saw it and I have also seen Morgan le Fay."

"My dear fellow, wake up! You've had a dream. I had no notion that liqueur was so strong!"

"It wasn't the liqueur. I tell you, Dowling, I have walked in the green dawn with Morgan le Fay. Did you see me land?"

"Yes."

"Then you saw my companion also."

"No one was with you but the man by the boat."

"No one? Why, that man saw her! What brought you out so early?"

"The green dawn. I happened to awake, and observing there was something uncommonly odd about the light, I came out to see what was the matter. Extraordinary effect, wasn't it!"

Leaning over the cliff paling was an elderly man, gaunt, vigorous, regarding Kenyon with intent gaze.

"Was that old Scotch gardener with you?" inquired Owen.

"Yes, he came on the cliff almost as soon as I did, and we discussed the dawn together; I found him very intelligent."

"Perhaps his eyesight may be better than yours, I will ask him;" and Kenyon went up to the old Scotchman.

"Did you notice the lady who landed with me?"

"Man," was the reply, "let it rest. Yon was no mortal woman with ye."

"Well, upon my soul!" ejaculated Dowling. "I'll swear I saw nothing."

"Weel, I ken ye didna, for ye said naething. But there she was, and nae shadow to her!"

"What did I tell you?" There was triumph in Kenyon's tones as he turned to his friend. "Here are three of us who saw her, and only one, yourself, who did not."

"Come and have some breakfast, that is what you need;" Dowling spoke with decision. "All apparitions can be exorcised by a good meal."

"Why this hurry? The morning is divine."

"So are the fish I am going to fry. Have to cook 'em myself at this hour; nobody else is awake. If the butcher would pull his shutters down I'd get a steak. I'd back a solid beefsteak to knock out all the ghosts that ever glimmered."

"I don't call Morgan le Fay a ghost."

"Call her anything you like, but come to breakfast."

Later Kenyon told the tale of the dawn, and all that he had seen therein.

"The dawn is all right," said Dowling, "but you don't expect me to believe the rest, do you? Your Morgan was my liqueur."

"The fisherman saw her."

"You say you gave him a couple of pounds for that piece of beaten gold. For half the money he would have seen two or three Morgans—a dozen if you wished."

"How do you account for the gold?"

"Washed ashore from some old wreck, and you picked it up unconsciously. In fact, you have been walking in your sleep. Somnambulism and the liqueur together created Morgan."

"That Scotch gardener saw her. Talk to him yourself."

Dowling shook his head. "Never ask a Scotchman anything unless you are prepared to believe his answer; which in this instance I am not, most emphatically not."

"There are more things——" began Kenyon.

"Don't," interrupted the other, "don't say it. You'll make me sick! If the author of that observation could have foreseen how it would become the pet phrase of every ghost-seeing noodle in Christendom—excuse me, Kenyon—the words would never have been written."

"They are true, nevertheless, and a ghost-seer may be speaking the truth also."

"He may, but more probably he is not. You are not speaking it, though you think you are."

"These matters are simply matters of time," said Owen. "I am too early for you."

"Too late."

"No, too early. I am only telling you things that a hundred years hence everyone will accept without controversy. Had you made a phonograph squeak and gibber a few centuries ago you and it would have burnt together."

"There is no real comparison. A phonograph is a material thing, your statement is immaterial—excuse me again—in every sense."

Kenyon laughed. "I give you up. But so surely as I sit here I have had my wish, I have spoken with Morgan le Fay!"

At noon that day a school of mackerel was reported in the bay, yet the fisherfolk stood about on the beach unheeding, talking among themselves of the unknown ill that must needs follow the appearance of the witch lady. It was folly, they argued, to tempt fate after that vision beheld in the dawn by one of themselves.

So the boats rocked idly on the ripples, while the sea decked itself in splendour of jewels and purple of Tyre.

In the afternoon, when the land-wind began to blow down from the moors, Kenyon sat under an elm on Mrs. Winter's lawn, with his cousin opposite to him, and a tea-table between them. She seemed a little absent, even a trifle embarrassed, and he did not remember to have seen her embarrassed before. "I wonder what it means," he reflected. "Dowling, perhaps. We shall see."

"My dear Charlotte," he presently observed, "you look delightful in that hat, and the gown is altogether charming, but are you not mistaking me for Dowling? Here are three lumps of sugar in my cup, whereas I never take any."

She started and flushed. "Oh, I am so sorry, Owen. I must have been thinking of something else."

"Does the 'something' trouble you?"

"No. At least——" she hesitated, and the flush deepened.

"Well, Charlotte?"

"I am sure we have always been very good friends, have we not?"

"Very," he assented, "and now you wish me to do something. What is it? Consider it done. Anything that pleases you will please me."

"But I am afraid this will not please you."

"Kenyon studied the fresh blooming face before him, and it reddened again under his gaze.

"Suppose I went to the Rockies to shoot bears—for an indefinite time. Would that please you?"

"I am sure you would enjoy it, Owen. You are so fond of wild places."

"I see. And the bears? Would they also enjoy it?"

"I don't know. You say such odd things!"

"At any rate, you would enjoy it; and I could send you a bear-skin for a wedding present when you are married; send it, you observe, not bring it."

"I do not wish to hurt your feelings, Owen."

"You don't, my dear cousin. You would really hurt my feelings if you made yourself unhappy by marrying me when you did not wish to do so. There is always enough unhappiness in the world without people deliberately brewing more. Therefore I will presently depart, if not to the Rockies at least to some place sufficiently removed."

"You are very good."

"Not at all. There is no particular goodness in following one's natural bent; I like smoothing things. Evidently I was intended

to be a road-mender, I should thoroughly enjoy making the rough places plain. As for those misguided individuals who habitually roll boulders large and small across the path of tired wayfarers, may the fate of Sisyphus be theirs ! ”

“ I have not said anything to aunt,” observed Charlotte, and her tone was doubtful.

“ Tell her it is my fault, and leave her to me. Dowling and I will manage her,” smiling. “ Here he comes. Shall I tell him ? ”

Charlotte cast a startled glance over her shoulder, and fled into the house as Dowling came up.

“ Don’t look so disappointed,” said Kenyon, as his friend’s eyes followed the girl’s retreating figure ; “ she will return by-and-by. Meanwhile, I have news for you. My Charlotte has just declined to cut bread and butter for me.”

“ What ? ”

“ Even so. Her hurried departure was in consequence of your breaking in upon our mutual congratulations.”

“ Are you speaking seriously ? ”

“ Quite seriously, and so is she. I will do Charlotte the justice to say she thoroughly knows her own mind, and that in itself is a grand virtue. I suppose I ought to feel rather small, and I suspect that I do ; yet what would I have ? The inconsistency of human nature ! I am free—to follow shadows, a shadow ; or to seek a reality of which I have seen the shadow. Reality ?—there can be no reality. Only the older, wilder civilizations produced such women as she whom men called Morgan le Fay.”

During this speech Dowling wore an air very unlike his usual aspect, the air of a man ill at ease.

“ My dear Kenyon,” he said gravely, “ if I have in any way conduced to this misunderstanding, I can only crave your pardon. I deserve a kicking. I——”

“ There is no misunderstanding whatever,” interrupted Kenyon. “ Charlotte and I understand each other perfectly. She may or may not prefer you, but she has made it clear that she doesn’t want me. We remain the best of friends, no more. I admire her good sense in thus settling the triangular situation we discussed last night, instead of letting things drift on to possible misery. And now I think I will have a row ; there is just time before dinner. I see my aunt at the end of the road, she will want tea, and Charlotte will reappear at the tea-table ; you stay here with them, or aunt will feel dull, and perhaps worry Charlotte.”

“ I will walk with you to the cliff. By the way, is it

absolutely necessary for you to go rowing to-day? I am not superstitious, as you know, but all these fishermen have given up their mackerel, and there may be unusual currents, or abnormal conditions of atmosphere." Dowling finished rather lamely, and Kenyon laughed.

"'Currents?' 'Conditions of atmosphere?' None of these things are the men's reasons for remaining ashore, as you very well know."

"I will go with you."

"I would rather be alone, thanks. There is no risk, and if there were, what then? If, like Hemison, 'deep draughts of death draw nigh my heart,' that is not the worst that can happen to a man. Why so solemn? All will go well, you will marry Charlotte, and I shall be the bachelor godfather of your children. Nothing could be more satisfactory." He glanced towards the distant moor, where in the northwest it rose darkly against the blue. "The country seat of Bel and the Dragon! Amazing cantrips there must have been on that plateau."

But Dowling was not interested just then in Bel and the Dragon.

"Why not take a boatman?" he urged, as they reached the cliff.

"Because he would not go. Also because I do not want him. Don't worry, old fellow, I shall be back to dinner. Look at the loveliness of that sea! From here it is a plain of lapis lazuli and malachite, with that marvellous shadow of Tyrian purple."

"The purple tint is caused by floating seaweed," said Dowling.

"Man of cold facts which ought to be warm fables, what does it matter what it is? There is the true Tyrian:—

"'And my soul from out the shadow that lies floating on the floor,
Shall be lifted—nevermore!'"

He went swiftly down to the beach, and Dowling, watching from the top of the cliff, saw him, after a little discussion with a boatman, get into a boat and row away. By-and-by boat and man became a mere speck on the sunlit waters, and mindful of Kenyon's behest, Dowling went back to Mrs. Winter's garden.

Owen did not appear at dinner, and his aunt and cousin thought he had probably rowed round the Point and stayed to dine with an acquaintance at one of the hotels there; in which idea Dowling acquiesced; for why cause them perhaps needless anxiety? But when he returned to his lodgings at eleven o'clock, and found Kenyon still absent, he spent the next hour in questioning the coast-guard and fishermen as to whether the

boat had been seen since the afternoon. At midnight Dowling walked to the Point, and explained matters to a friend who owned a steam launch; with the result that the fussy little craft vainly disturbed the peace of the moonlit coves along the coast till the east began to pale.

Then in the dawn—a dawn not green, but white-gold—the missing boat was rocking gently by the beach whence it had started the previous day, and in it lay Kenyon apparently asleep, but it was the sleep that knows no waking.

That morning the fishing boats went out into the bay, for the unknown ill was now known, and men could go about their business in security.

Five years later, Dowling was showing to a friend a cabinet of curiosities he had picked up here and there.

"That?" he said, as his friend noticed a small leaf delicately modelled in gold; "yes, it is old, I believe. What do you think of the workmanship?"

"The leaf is extraordinarily heavy for its size, must be pure gold, looks like it. The workmanship is wonderful. Where did you get it?"

"Could you imagine Hiram of Tyre made it—the workman, I mean; not the king?"

"Why? Did it come from some old tomb? It is undoubtedly very ancient"

"It came from the sea-shore down west. There is a singular story connected with it. Not that I believe a word of the tale, the whole thing is preposterous. It concerns a cousin of my wife's; dead, poor fellow! I knew him well; delightful companion. Sit down, and I will tell you how the leaf came into my hands."

So during the half-hour before dinner, in an evening of late autumn, firelight and lamplight shining on the leaf of yellow gold lying on the table, Dowling related that strange happening in the green dawn of a past summer.

"Of course," he finished, "the appearance was a mere hallucination of poor Kenyon's. His mind had been dwelling on old legends, and he simply got up and walked in his sleep."

"Was he a somnambulist?" asked the friend.

"No, never. But how else is the wild idea to be accounted for?"

"You say that you yourself saw the green dawn?"

"Oh yes, the dawn was green enough, green as grass; I am positive, though, that Kenyon was alone."

"Yet the fisherman and the Scotch gardener both saw her."

"The fisherman saw two pounds, one for each eye."

"And the Scotchman?"

"Well, his name was Mac-something or other, and those Highlanders have a trick of seeing visions."

"I own I am impressed by the fact of those two men having also seen her."

"Saying they had seen her," corrected Dowling.

"And the leaf of gold; how do you explain that?"

"Easily. Kenyon picked it up unconsciously in his sleep, while wandering along the shore. No doubt it had been churned up by the sea out of sand depths into which it had sunk ages ago from some Phoenician galley."

The friend thoughtfully turned the leaf over and over.

"Whereabouts did you say the place was?"

"Three miles from Motcombe," and Dowling described the hamlet.

"Then if one went down there in the summer, one might possibly see a green dawn?"

"Certainly, the conditions of atmosphere being favourable; great and continued heat, with clear skies."

"But not the 'shadow with bright hair?'"

Dowling shook his head. "A dream, no more—as I said at the time."

"Nevertheless, despite your unbelief, I am resolved to go there this next summer, and as I have some Highland blood in my veins, I shall hope to see, not only a green dawn, but also the shadow, Morgan le Fay."

"I wouldn't risk it," said Dowling, looking rather serious.

"Oh, so you do believe the story?"

"No, I don't, but poor Kenyon's death has given me a dislike to these superstitions. Such things occasionally work themselves out, as it were. Kenyon died from heart failure, the result of over exertion in rowing. I hardly think, however, that he would have remained out at sea so long had he not been possessed by his belief in the reality of his dream."

"The shadow brings a darker shadow—yes, I see. Yet I will risk it—next summer I will risk it!"

C. L. ANTROBUS.

Albergo Empedocle.

THE last letter I had from Harold was from Naples.

"We've just come back from Pompeii," he wrote. "On the whole it's decidedly no go and very tiring. What with the smells and the beggars and the mosquitoes we're rather off Naples altogether, and we've changed our plans and are going to Sicily. The guide-books say you can run through it in no time; only four places you have to go to, and very little in them. That suits us to a T. Pompeii and the awful Museum here have fairly killed us—except of course Mildred, and perhaps Sir Edwin.

"Now why don't you come too? I know you're keen on Sicily, and we all would like it. You would be able to spread yourself no end with your archæology. For once in my life I should have to listen while you jaw. You'd enjoy discussing temples, gods, etc., with Mildred. She's taught me a lot, but of course it's no fun for her, talking to us. Send a wire; I'll stand the cost. Start at once and we'll wait for you. The Peaslakes say the same, especially Mildred.

"My not sleeping at night, and my headaches are all right now, thanks very much. As for the blues, I haven't had any since I've been engaged, and don't intend to. So don't worry any more. Yours,

"HAROLD.

"Dear Tommy, if you aren't an utter fool you'll let me pay your ticket out."

I did not go. I could just have managed it, but Sicily was then a very sacred name to me, and the thought of running through it in no time, even with Harold, deterred me. I went afterwards, and as I am well acquainted with all who went then, and have had circumstantial information of all that happened, I think that my account of the affair will be as intelligible as anyone's.

I am conceited enough to think that if I had gone, the man I love most in the world would not now be in an asylum.

CHAPTER I.

THE Peaslake party was most harmonious in its composition. Four out of the five were Peaslakes, which partly accounted for the success, but the fifth, Harold, seemed to have been created to

go with them. They had started from England soon after his engagement to Mildred Peaslake, and had been flying over Europe for two months. At first they were a little ashamed of their rapidity, but the delight of continual custom-house examinations soon seized them, and they had hardly learnt what "Come in," and "Hot water, please," were in one language, before they crossed the frontier and had to learn them in another.

But, as Harold truly said, "People say we don't see things properly, and are globe-trotters, and all that, but after all one travels to enjoy oneself, and no one can say that we aren't having a ripping time."

Every party, to be really harmonious, must have a physical and an intellectual centre. Harold provided one, Mildred the other. He settled whether a mountain had to be climbed or a walk taken, and it was his fists that were clenched when a porter was insolent, or a cabman tried to overcharge. Mildred, on the other hand, was the fount of information. It was she who generally held the "Baedeker" and explained it. She had been expecting her Continental scramble for several years, and had read a fair amount of books for it, which a good memory often enabled her to reproduce.

But they all agreed that she was no dry encyclopædia. Her appetite for facts was balanced by her reverence for imagination.

"It is imagination," she would say, "that makes the past live again. It sets the centuries at naught."

"Rather!" was the invariable reply of Harold, who was notoriously deficient in it. Recreating the past was apt to give him a headache, and his thoughts obstinately returned to the unromantic present, which he found quite satisfactory. He was fairly rich, fairly healthy, very much in love, very fond of life, and he was content to worship in Mildred those higher qualities which he did not possess himself.

These two between them practically ran the party, and both Sir Edwin and Lady Peaslake were glad that the weight of settling or explaining anything should be lifted off their shoulders. Sir Edwin sometimes held the "Baedeker," but his real function was the keeping of a diary in which he put down the places they went to, the people they met, and the times of the trains. Lady Peaslake's department was packing, hotels, and the purchasing of presents for a large circle of acquaintance. As for Lilian, Mildred's sister, whatever pleased other people pleased her. Altogether it was a most delightful party.

They were however just a little subdued and quiet during that journey from Palermo to Girgenti. They had done Palermo in

even less time than Baedeker had allowed for it, and such audacity must tell on the most robust of tourists. Furthermore they had made an early start, as they had to get to Girgenti for lunch, do the temples in the afternoon, and go on the next morning to Syracuse.

It was no wonder that Lady Peaslake was too weary to look out of the window, and that Harold yawned when Mildred explained at some length how it was that a Greek temple came to be built out of Greece.

"Poor boy! you're tired," she said, without bitterness, and without surprise.

Harold blushed at his impoliteness.

"We really do too much," said Lady Peaslake. "I never bought that Sicilian cart for Mrs. Popham. It would have been the very thing. She will have something out of the way. If a thing's at all ordinary she will hardly say thank you. Harold, would you try at Girgenti? Mind you beat them down. Four francs is the outside."

"Certainly, Lady Peaslake." His method of purchasing for her, was to pay whatever was asked, and to make good the difference out of his own pocket.

"Girgenti will produce more than Sicilian carts," said Mildred, smoothing down the pages of the guide book. "In Greek times it was the second city of the island, wasn't it? It was famous for the ability, wealth, and luxury of its inhabitants. You remember, Harold, it was called Acragas."

"Acragas, Acragas," chanted Harold, striving to rescue one word from the chaos. The effect was too much for him, and he gave another yawn.

"Really, Harold!" said Mildred, laughing. "You're very much exhausted."

"I've scarcely slept for three nights," he replied in rather an aggrieved voice.

"Oh, my dear boy! I'm very sorry. I had no idea."

"Why did not you tell me?" said Sir Edwin. "We would have started later. Yes, I see you do look tired."

"It's so queer. It's ever since I've been in Sicily. Perhaps Girgenti will be better."

"Have you never slept since Naples?"

"Oh, I did sleep for an hour or so last night. But that was because I used my dodge."

"Dodge!" said Sir Edwin, "whatever do you mean!"

"You know it, don't you? You pretend you're someone else, and then you go asleep in no time."

"Indeed I do not know it," said Sir Edwin emphatically.

Mildred's curiosity was aroused. She had never heard Harold say anything unexpected before, and she was determined to question him.

"How extremely interesting! How very interesting! I don't know it either. Who do you imagine yourself to be?"

"Oh, no one—anyone. I just say to myself, 'That's someone lying awake. Why doesn't he go to sleep if he's tired?' Then he—I mean I—do, and it's all right."

"But that is a very wonderful thing. Why didn't you do it all three nights?"

"Well, to tell the truth," said Harold, rather confused, "I promised Tommy I'd never do it again. You see, I used to do it, not only when I couldn't sleep, but also when I was in the blues about something—or nothing—as one is, I don't know why. It doesn't get rid of them, but it kind of makes me so strong that I don't care for them—I can't explain. One morning Tommy came to see me, and I never knew him till he shook me. Naturally he was horribly sick, and made me promise never to do it again."

"And why have you done it again?" said Sir Edwin.

"Well, I did hold out two nights. But last night I was so dead tired, I couldn't think what I wanted to—of course you understand that: it's rather beastly. All the night I had to keep saying 'I'm lying awake, I'm lying awake, I'm lying awake,' and it got more and more difficult. And when it was almost time to get up, I made a slip and said, 'He's lying awake'—and then off I went."

"How very, very interesting," said Mildred, and Lilian cried that it was a simply splendid idea, and that she should try it next time she had the toothache.

"Indeed, Lilian," said her mother, "I beg you'll do no such thing."

"No, indeed," said Sir Edwin, who was looking grave. "Harold, your friend was quite right. It is never safe to play tricks with the brain. I must say I'm astonished: you of all people!"

"Yes," said Harold, looking at a very substantial hand. "I'm such a stodgy person. It is odd. It isn't brain or imagination or anything like that. I simply pretend."

"It is imagination," said Mildred in a low determined voice.

"Whatever it is, it must stop," said Sir Edwin. "It's a dangerous habit. You must break yourself of it before it is fully formed."

"Yes. I promised Tommy. I shall try again to night," said Harold, with a pitiful little sigh of fatigue.

"I'll arrange to have a room communicating with yours. If you can't sleep to-night, call me."

"Thanks very much, I'm sure not to do it if you're near. It only works when one's alone. Tommy stopped it by taking rooms in the same house, which was decent of him."

The conversation had woke them up. The girls were quiet, Lilian being awed, and Mildred being rather annoyed with her parents for their want of sympathy with imagination. She felt that Harold had so little, that unless it was nourished it would disappear. She crossed over to him, and managed to say in a low voice,

"You please me very much. I had no idea you were like this before. We live in a world of mystery."

Harold smiled complacently at the praise, and being sure that he could not say anything sensible, held his tongue. Mildred at once began to turn his newly-found powers to the appreciation of Girgenti.

"Think," she said, "of the famous men who visited her in her prime. Pindar, Aeschylus, Plato—and as for Empedocles, of course he was born there."

"Oh!"

"The disciple, you know, of Pythagoras, who believed in the transmigration of souls."

"Oh!"

"It's a beautiful idea, isn't it, that the soul should have several lives."

"But, Mildred darling," said the gentle voice of Lady Peaslake, "we know that it is not so."

"Oh, I didn't mean that, mamma. I only said it was a beautiful idea."

"But not a true one, darling."

"No."

Their voices had sunk into that respectful monotone which is always considered suitable when the soul is under discussion. They all looked awkward and ill at ease. Sir Edwin played tunes on his waistcoat buttons, and Harold blew into the bowl of his pipe. Mildred, a little confused at her temerity, passed on to the terrible sack of Acragas by the Romans. Whereat their faces relaxed, and they regained their accustomed spirits.

"But what are dates?" said Mildred. "What are facts, or even names of persons? They carry one a very little way. In a place like this one must simply feel."

"Rather," said Harold, trying to fix his attention.

"You must throw yourself into a past age if you want to appreciate it thoroughly. To-day you must imagine you are a Greek."

"Really, Mildred," said Sir Edwin, "you're almost too fanciful."

"No, father, I'm not. Harold understands. He must forget all these modern horrors of railways and Cook's tours, and think that he's living over two thousand years ago, among palaces and temples. He must think and feel and act like a Greek. It's the only way. He must—well, he must be a Greek."

"The sea! the sea!" interrupted Harold. "How absolutely ripping! I swear I'll put in a bathe!"

"Oh, you incorrigible boy!" said Mildred, joining in the laugh at the failure of her own scheme. "Show me the sea, then."

They were still far away from it, for they had hardly crossed the watershed of the island. It was the country of the mines, barren and immense, absolutely destitute of grass or trees, producing nothing but cakes of sallow sulphur, which were stacked on the platform of every wayside station. Human beings were scanty, and they were stunted and dry, mere withered vestiges of men. And far below at the bottom of the yellow waste was the moving living sea, which embraced Sicily when she was green and delicate and young, and embraces her now, when she is brown and withered and dying.

"I see something more interesting than the sea," said Mildred. "I see Girgenti."

She pointed to a little ridge of brown hill far beneath them, on the summit of which a few grey buildings were huddled together.

"Oh, what a dreadful place!" cried poor Lady Peaslake. "How uncomfortable we are going to be."

"Oh dearest mother, it's only for one night. What are a few drawbacks, when we are going to see temples! Temples, Greek temples! Doesn't the word make you thrill?"

"Well, no dear, it doesn't. I should have thought the Pesto ones would have been enough. These can't be very different."

"I consider you are a recreant party," said Mildred in a sprightly voice. "First it's Harold, now it's you. I'm the only worthy one among you. To-day I mean to be a Greek. What hotel do we go to?"

Lady Peaslake produced her note-book and said "Grand Hôtel des Temples. Recommended by Mr. Dimbleby. Ask for a back room, as those have the view."

But at the Girgenti railway station, the man from the Temples told them that his hotel was full, and Mildred, catching sight of

the modest omnibus of the "Albergo Empedocle," suggested that they should go there, because it sounded so typical.

"You remember what the doctrine of Empedocles was, Harold?"

The wretched Harold had forgotten.

Sir Edwin was meanwhile being gently urged into the omnibus by the man from the "Empedocle."

"We know nothing about it, absolutely nothing. Are you—have you clean beds?"

The man from the "Empedocle" raised his eyes and hands to Heaven, so ecstatic was his remembrance of the purity of the blankets, the spotlessness of the sheets. At last words came, and he said, "The beds of the Empedocle! They are celestial. One spends one night there, and one remembers it for ever!"

CHAPTER II.

SIR EDWIN and Lady Peaslake were sitting in the temple of Juno Lacinia and leaning back on a Doric column—which is a form of architecture neither comfortable as a cushion nor adequate as a parasol. They were as cross as it was possible for good-tempered people to be. Their lunch at the dirty hotel had disagreed with them, and the wine that was included with it had made them heavy. The drive to the temples had joggled them up and one of the horses had fallen down. They had been worried to buy flowers, figs, shells, sulphur crystals, and new-laid antiquities, they had been pestered by the beggars and bitten by the fleas. Had they been Sicilian born they would have known what was the matter, and lying down on the grass, on the flowers, on the road, on the temple steps—on anything, would have sunk at once into that marvellous mid-day sleep which is fed by light and warmth and air. But being northern born they did not know—nor could they have slept if they had.

"Where on earth are Harold and Mildred?" asked Lady Peaslake. She did not want to know, but she was restless with fatigue.

"I can't think why we couldn't all keep together," said Sir Edwin.

"You see, papa," said Lilian, "Mildred wants to see the temples that have tumbled down as well as these, and Harold is taking her."

"He's a poor guide," said Sir Edwin. "Really, Lilian, I begin to think that Harold is rather stupid. Of course I'm very fond of him, he's a thoroughly nice fellow, honest as the day, and he's

good-looking and well made—I value all that extremely—but after all brains are something. He is so slow—so lamentably slow—at catching one’s meaning.”

“But, father dear,” replied Lilian, who was devoted to Harold, “he’s tired.”

“I am tired, too, but I can keep my wits about me. He seems in a dream; when the horse fell he never attempted to get down and sit on its head. It might have kicked us to pieces. He’s as helpless as a baby with beggars. He’s too idle to walk properly; three times he trod on my toes, and he fell up the temple steps and broke your camera. He’s blind, he’s deaf—I may say he’s dumb, too. Now this is pure stupidity, and I believe that stupidity can be cured just like anything else, if you make the effort.”

Lilian continued the defence, and repeated that he had hardly slept for three nights.

“Ridiculous. Why can’t he sleep? It’s stupidity again. An effort is needed—that is all. He can cure it if he chooses.”

“He does know how to cure it,” said Lilian, “but you thought—and so did he—that——”

She produced an explosion of ill-temper in her father, which was quite unprecedented.

“I’m very much annoyed with him. He has no right to play tricks with his brain. And what’s more I am annoyed with Mildred, too.”

“Oh, father!”

“She encourages him in his silliness—makes him think he’s clever. I’m extremely annoyed, and I shall speak to them both, as soon as I get the opportunity.”

Lilian was surprised and pained. Her father had never blamed anyone so strongly before. She did not know—indeed, he did not know himself—that neither the indigestion nor the heat, nor the beggars, nor the fleas were the real cause of his irritation. He was annoyed because he failed to understand.

Mildred he could pardon; she had merely been indiscreet, and as she had gone in for being clever when quite a child, such things were to be expected from her. Besides, he shrewdly guessed that, although she might sometimes indulge in fancies, yet when it came to action she could be trusted to behave in a thoroughly conventional manner. Thank heaven! she was seldom guilty of confusing books with life.

But Harold did not escape so easily, for Sir Edwin absolutely failed to understand him, for the first time. Hitherto he had believed that he understood him perfectly. Harold’s character

was so simple ; it consisted of little more than two things, the power to love and the desire for truth, and Sir Edwin, like many a wiser thinker, concluded that what was not complicated could not be mysterious. Similarly, because Harold's intellect did not devote itself to the acquisition of facts or to the elaboration of emotions, he had concluded that he was stupid. But now, just because he could send himself to sleep by an unexplained device, he spied a mystery in him, and was aggrieved.

He was right. There was a mystery, and a great one. Yet it was trivial and unimportant in comparison with the power to love and the desire for truth—things which he saw daily, and, because he had seen daily, ignored.

His meditations took shape, and he flung this challenge at the unknown : " I'll have no queerness in a son-in-law ! " He was sitting in a Doric temple with a sea of gold and purple flowers tossing over its ruins, and his eyes looked out to the moving, living sea of blue. But his ears caught neither the echo of the past nor the cry of the present, for he was suddenly paralysed with the fear that after all he had not done so well for his daughter as he hoped.

Meanwhile, Mildred, at the other end of the line of temples, was concentrated on the echoes of the past. Harold was even more inattentive to them than usual. He was very sleepy, and would only say that the flowers were rather jolly and that the sea looked in prime condition if only one could try it. To the magnificence and pathos of the ruined temple of Zeus he was quite dead. He only valued it as a chair.

" Suppose you go back and rest in the carriage ? " said Mildred, with a shade of irritation in her voice.

He shook his head and sat yawning at the sea, thinking how wonderfully the water would fizz up over his body and how marvellously cold would be the pale blue pools among the rocks. Mildred endeavoured to recall him to higher pleasures by reading out of her " Baedeker."

She turned round to explain something and he was gone.

At first she thought it was a mild practical joke, such as they did not disdain to play on each other ; then that he had changed his mind and gone back to the carriage. But the custodian at the gate said that no one had gone out, and she returned to search the ruins.

The temple of Zeus—the third greatest temple of the Greek world—has been overthrown by an earthquake, and now resembles a ruined mountain rather than a ruined building. There is a well-made path, which makes a circuit over the mass, and is

amply sufficient for all rational tourists. Those who wish to see more have to go mountaineering over gigantic columns and pilasters, and squeeze their way through passes of cut stone.

Harold was not on the path, and Mildred was naturally annoyed. Few things are more vexatious for a young lady than to go out with an escort and return without. It argues remissness on her own part quite as much as on that of her swain.

Having told the custodian to stop Harold if he tried to come out, she began a systematic hunt. She saw an enormous block of stone from which she would get a good view of the chaos, and wading through the gold and purple flowers that separated her from it, scrambled up.

On its further side were two fallen columns, lying close together, and the space that separated them had been silted up and was covered with flowers. On it, as on a bed, lay Harold, fast asleep, his cheek pressed against the hot stone of one of the columns, and his breath swaying a little blue iris that had rooted in one of its cracks.

The indignant Mildred was about to wake him, but seeing the dark line that still showed beneath his eyes, stayed her voice. Besides, he looked so picturesque, and she herself, sitting on the stone watching him, must look picturesque, too. She knew that there was no one to look at her, but from her mind the idea of a spectator was never absent for a moment. It was the price she had paid for becoming cultivated.

Sleep has little in common with death, to which men have compared it. Harold's limbs lay in utter relaxation, but he was tingling with life, glorying in the bounty of the earth and the warmth of the sun, and the little blue flower bent and fluttered like a tree in a gale. The light beat upon his eyelids and the grass leaves tickled his hair, but he slept on, and the lines faded out of his face as he grasped the greatest gift that the animal life can offer. And Mildred watched him, thinking what a picture might be made of the scene.

Then her meditation changed. "What a wonderful thing is sleep! How I would like to know what is passing through his brain as he lies there. He looks so peaceful and happy. Poor boy! when he is awake he often looks worried. I think it is because he can't follow the conversation, though I try to make it simple, don't I? Yet some things he sees quite quickly. And I'm sure he has lots of imagination, if only he would let it come out. At all events I love him very much, and I believe I shall love him more, for it seems to me that there will be more in him than I expected."

She suddenly remembered his "dodge" for going to sleep, and her interest and her agitation increased.

"Perhaps, even now, he imagines himself to be someone else. What a marvellous idea! What will he say if he wakes? How mysterious everything is if only one could realise it. Harold, of all people, who seemed so ordinary—though, of course, I love him. But I am going to love him more."

She longed to reach him in his sleep, to guide the course of his dreams, to tell him that she approved of him and loved him. She had read of such a thing. In accordance with the advice of the modern spiritualistic novel she pressed her hands on her temples and made a mental effort. At the end of five minutes she had a slight headache and had effected nothing. He had not moved, he had not even sighed in his sleep, and the little blue flower still bent and fluttered, bent and fluttered in the regular onslaught of his breath.

The awakening, when it did come, found her thoughts unprepared. They had wandered to earthly things, as thoughts will do at times. At the supreme moment, she was wondering whether her stockings would last till she got back to England. And Harold, all unobserved, had woken up, and the little blue flower had quivered and was still. He had woken up because he was no longer tired, woken up to find himself in the midst of beautiful flowers, beautiful columns, beautiful sunshine, with Mildred, whom he loved, sitting by him. Life at that moment was too delicious for him to speak.

Mildred saw all the romance melting away: he looked so natural and so happy: there was nothing mysterious about him after all. She waited for him to speak.

Ten minutes passed, and still he had not spoken. His eyes were fixed steadily upon her, and she became nervous and uncomfortable. Why would he not speak? She determined to break the silence herself, and at last, in a tremulous voice, called him by his name.

The result was overwhelming, for his answer surpassed all that her wildest flights of fancy had imagined, and fulfilled beyond all dreaming her cravings for the unimagined and the unseen.

He said, "I've lived here before."

Mildred was choking. She could not reply.

He was quite calm. "I always knew it," he said, "but it was too far down in me. Now that I've slept here it is at the top. I've lived here before."

"Oh, Harold!" she gasped.

"Mildred!" he cried, in sudden agitation, "are you going to

believe it—that I have lived before—lived such a wonderful life—I can't remember it yet—lived it here? It's no good answering to please me."

Mildred did not hesitate a moment. She was carried away by the magnificence of the idea, the glory of the scene and the earnest beauty of his eyes, and in an ecstasy of rapture she cried, "I do believe."

"Yes," said Harold, "you do. If you hadn't believed now you never would have. I wonder what would have happened to me."

"More, more!" cried Mildred, who was beginning to find her words. "How could you smile! how could you be so calm! O marvellous idea! that your soul has lived before! I should run about, shriek, sing. Marvellous! overwhelming! How can you be so calm! The mystery! and the poetry, oh, the poetry! How can you support it? Oh, speak again!"

"I don't see any poetry," said Harold. "It just has happened, that's all. I lived here before."

"You are a Greek! You have been a Greek! Oh, why do you not die when you remember it."

"Why should I? I might have died if you hadn't believed me. It's nothing to remember."

"Aren't you shattered, exhausted?"

"No: I'm awfully fit. I know that you must have believed me now or never. Remembering has made me so strong. I see myself to the bottom now."

"Marvellous! marvellous!" she repeated.

He leapt up on to the stone beside her. "You've believed me. That's the only thing that's marvellous. The rest's nothing." He flung his arms round her, and embraced her—an embrace very different from the decorous peck by which he had marked the commencement of their engagement. Mildred, clinging to him, murmured "I do believe you," and they gazed without flinching into each other's eyes.

Harold broke the silence, saying, "How very happy life is going to be."

But Mildred was still wrapped in the glamour of the past. "More! more!" she cried, "tell me more! What was the city like—and the people in it? Who were you?"

"I don't remember yet—and it doesn't matter."

"Harold, keep nothing from me! I will not breathe a word. I will be silent as the grave."

"I shall keep nothing. As soon as I remember things, I will tell them. And why should you tell no one? There's nothing wrong."

"They would not believe."

"I shouldn't mind. I only minded about you."

"Still—I think it is best a secret. Will you agree?"

"Yes—for you may be right. It's nothing to do with the others. And it wouldn't interest them."

"And think—think hard who you were."

"I do just remember this—that I was a lot greater then than I am now. I'm greater now than I was this morning, I think—but then!"

"I knew it! I knew it from the first! I have known it always. You have been a king—a king! You ruled here when Greece was free!"

"Oh! I don't mean that—at least I don't remember it. And was I a Greek?"

"A Greek!" she stammered indignantly. "Of course you were a Greek, a Greek of Acragas."

"Oh, I daresay I was. Anyhow it doesn't matter. To be believed! Just fancy! you've believed me. You needn't have, but you did. How happy life is!"

He was in an ecstasy of happiness in which all time except the present had passed away. But Mildred had a tiny thrill of disappointment. She revered the past as well.

"What do you mean then, Harold, when you say you were greater?"

"I mean I was better, I saw better, heard better, thought better."

"Oh, I see," said Mildred fingering her watch. Harold, in his most prosaic manner, said they must not keep the carriage waiting, and they regained the path.

The tide of rapture had begun to ebb away from Mildred. His generalities bored her. She longed for detail, vivid detail, that should make the dead past live. It was of no interest to her that he had once been greater.

"Don't you remember the temples?"

"No."

"Nor the people?"

"Not yet."

"Don't you at all recollect what century you lived in?"

"How on earth am I to know!" he laughed.

Mildred was silent. She had hoped he would have said the fifth B.C.—the period in which she was given to understand that the Greek race was at its prime. He could tell her nothing; he did not even seem interested, but began talking about Mrs. Popham's present.

At last she thought of a question he might be able to answer. "Did you also love better?" she asked in a low voice.

"I loved very differently." He was holding back the brambles to prevent them from tearing her dress as he spoke. One of the thorns scratched him on the hand. "Yes, I loved better too," he continued, watching the little drops of blood swell out.

"What do you mean? Tell me more."

"I keep saying I don't know any more. It is fine to remember that you've been better than you are. You know, Mildred, I'm much more worth you than I've ever been before. I do believe I am fairly great."

"Oh!" said Mildred, who was getting bored.

They had reached the temple of Concord, and he retrieved his tactlessness by saying, "After all I'm too happy to go back yet. I love you too much. Let's rest again."

They sat down on the temple steps, and at the end of ten minutes Mildred had forgotten all her little disappointments, and only remembered this mysterious sleep, and his marvellous awakening. Then, at the very height of her content, she felt, deep down within her, the growth of a new wonder.

"Harold, how is it you can remember?"

"The lid can't have been put on tight last time I was sent out."

"And that," she murmured, "might happen to anyone."

"I should think it has—to lots. They only want reminding."

"It might happen to me."

"Yes."

"I too," she said slowly, "have often not been able to sleep. Oh, Harold, is it possible?"

"What?"

"That I have lived before."

"Of course it is."

"Oh, Harold, I too may remember."

"I hope you will. It's wonderful to remember a life better than this one. I can't explain how happy it makes you: there's no need to try or to worry. It'll come if it is coming."

"Oh, Harold! I am remembering!"

He grasped her hands crying, "Remember only what is good. Remember that you were greater than you are now! I would give my life to help you."

"You have helped me," she cried, quivering with excitement. "All fits together. I remember all. It is not the first time I have known you. We have met before. Oh, how often have I dimly felt it. I felt it when I watched you sleeping—but then I didn't understand. Our love is not new. Here in this very place

when there was a great city full of gorgeous palaces and snow-white marble temples, full of poets and music, full of marvellous pictures, full of sculptures of which we can hardly dream, full of noble men and noble thoughts, bounded by the sapphire sea, covered by the azure sky, here in the wonderful youth of Greece did I speak to you and know you and love you. We walked through the marble streets, we led solemn sacrifices, I armed you for the battle, I welcomed you from the victory. The centuries have parted us, but not for ever. Harold, I too have lived at Acragas!"

Round the corner swept the Peaslakes' carriage, full of excited occupants. He had only time to whisper in her ear, "No Mildred darling, you have not."

CHAPTER III.

THERE was a dirty little sitting room in the Albergo Empedocle, and Mildred was sitting there after dinner waiting for her father. He had met some friends at the temples, and he and she had agreed to pay them a visit. It was a cold night, and the room smelt of mustiness and lamp oil. The only other occupant was a stiff-backed lady who had found a three-year-old number of *Home Chat*. Lady Peaslake, Lilian, and Harold were all with Sir Edwin, hunting for the key of his Gladstone bag. Till it was found he could not go out with her, for all his clean collars were inside.

Mildred was thoroughly miserable. After long torture she had confessed to herself that she was self-deceived. She had never lived in Acragas. She remembered nothing. All her glowing description was pure imagination, the result of sentimental excitement. For instance she had spoken of "snow-white marble temples." That was nonsense, sheer nonsense. She had seen the remains of those temples, and they were built of porous stone, not marble. And she remembered now that the Sicilian Greeks always covered their temples with coloured stucco. At first she had tried to thrust such objections away and to believe that she had found a truth to which archæology must yield. But what pictures or music did she remember? When had she buckled on Harold's armour, and what was it like? Was it probable that they had led a sacrifice together? The visions, always misty, faded away. She had never lived in Acragas.

But that was only the beginning of her mortification. Harold had proved her wrong. He had seen that she was a shifty,

shallow hypocrite. She had not dared to be alone with him since her exposure. She had never looked at him and had hardly spoken. He seemed cheerful, but what was he thinking? He would never forgive her.

Had she only realised that it is only hypocrites who cannot forgive hypocrisy, whereas those who search for truth are too conscious of the maze to be hard on others—then the bitter flow of her thoughts might have been stopped and the catastrophe averted. But it was not conceivable to her that she should forgive—or that she should accept forgiveness, for to her forgiveness meant a triumph of one person over another.

So she went still further towards sorrow. She felt that Harold had scored off her, and she determined to make the score as little as she could. Was he really as sincere as he had seemed? Sincere he might be, but he might be self-deceived even as she was. That would explain all. He too had been moved by the beauty of the scene, by its wonderful associations. Worn out he had fallen asleep, and, conscious perhaps that she was in a foolish sympathetic state, had indulged in a fit of imagination on awaking. She had fallen in with it, and they had encouraged each other to fresh deeds of folly. All was clear. And how was she to hide it from her father?

Each time she re-stated the question it took a more odious form. Even though she believed Harold had been as foolish as herself, she was still humiliated before him, for her folly had been revealed, and his had not. The last and worst thought pressed itself upon her. Was he really as simple as he seemed? Had he not been trying to deceive her? He had been so careful in speaking of his old life: would only say that he had been "greater," "better"—never gave one single detail by which archæology might prove him wrong. It was very clever of him. He had never lost his head once. Jealous of her superior acquirements, he had determined to put her to ridicule. He had laid a cunning bait and she had swallowed it. How cleverly he had lured her on to make the effort of recollection! How patiently he had heard her rapturous speech, in order that he might prove her silly to the core! How diabolically worded was his retort—"No, Mildred darling, you have not lived at Acragas." It implied, "I will be kind to you and treat you well when you are my wife, but recollect that you are silly, emotional, hypocritical: that your pretensions to superiority are gone for ever; that I have proved you inferior to me, even as all women are inferior to all men. Dear Mildred, you are a fool!"

"Intolerable! intolerable!" she gasped to herself, "if only I

could expose him! I never dreamt it of him! I was never on my guard!"

Harold came quickly into the room, and she was at once upon the defensive. He told her that her father was ready and she got up to go, her ears aching in expectation of some taunt. It came—a very subtle one. She heard him say, "Kiss me before you go," and felt his hands grasp her elbows.

"No!" she said, shrinking from his touch, and frowning towards the stiff-backed lady, who sat a little stiffer.

"You'll have to," was his reply, and catching hold of her—he was very strong—he lifted her right above his head, and broke the feathers in her hat against the ceiling. He never completed his embrace, for she shrieked aloud, inarticulate with passion, and the voice of Sir Edwin was heard saying "Come, come, Harold, my boy,—come, come!"

He set her down, and white with rage she hissed at him, "I never thought I should live to find you both charlatan and cad," and left the room.

Had she stayed, she would have been gratified at the prompt effect of her rebuke. Harold stood where she left him, dumb with misery, and then, without further warning, began to cry. He cried without shame or restraint, not even turning his head or covering his face with his hands, but letting the tears run down his cheeks till they caught in his moustache, or dropped on to the floor. Sir Edwin, not unmoved, stood before him for a moment, stammering as he tried to think of something that should both rebuke and console.

But the world has forgotten what to say to men of twenty-four who cry. Sir Edwin followed his daughter, giving a despairing look at Lady Peaslake and Lilian as he departed.

Lady Peaslake took up the line of behaving as if nothing had happened, and began talking in a high voice about the events of the day. Harold did not attempt to leave the room, but still stood near the table, sobbing and gulping for breath.

Lilian, moved by a more human impulse, tremulously asked him why he cried, and at this point the stiff-backed lady, who had sat through everything, gathered up her skirts as if she had seen a beetle, and slipped from the room.

"I cry because I'm unhappy: because Mildred's angry with me."

"Er—er," said Lady Peaslake, "I'm sure that it would be Mildred's wish that you should stop."

"I thought at dinner," he gasped, "that she was not pleased. Why? Why? Nothing had happened. Nothing but happiness, I mean. The best way, I thought, of showing I love her is to

kiss her, and that will make her understand again. You know, she understood everything."

"Oh yes," said Lady Peaslake. "Look," she added to divert him, "how do you like my new embroidery?"

"It's hideous—perfectly hideous!" was his vigorous reply.

"Well, here is a particular gentleman!" said good-natured Lady Peaslake. "Why, it's Liberty!"

"Frightful," said Harold. He had stopped crying. His face was all twisted with pain, but such a form of expressing emotion is fairly suitable for men, and Lady Peaslake felt easier.

But he returned to Mildred. "She called me a cad and a charlatan."

"Oh, never mind!" said Lilian.

"I may be a cad. I never did quite see what a cad is, and no one ever quite explained to me. But a charlatan! Why did she call me a charlatan? I can't quite see what I've done."

He began to walk up and down the little room. Lady Peaslake gently suggested a stroll, but he took no notice and kept murmuring "Charlatan."

"Why are pictures like this allowed!" he suddenly cried. He had stopped in front of a coloured print in which the martyrdom of St. Agatha was depicted with all the fervour that incompetence could command.

"It's only a saint," said Lady Peaslake, placidly raising her head.

"How disgusting—and how ugly!"

"Yes, very. It's Roman Catholic."

He turned away shuddering, and began his everlasting question—"Why did she call me a charlatan?"

Lady Peaslake felt compelled to say—"You see, Harold, you annoyed her, and when people are annoyed they will say anything. I know it by myself."

"But a charlatan! I know for certain that she understands me. Only this afternoon I told her——"

"Oh, yes," said Lady Peaslake.

"Told her that I had lived before—lived here over two thousand years ago, she thinks."

"Harold! my dear Harold! what nonsense are you talking?" Lady Peaslake had risen from her chair.

"Over two thousand years ago, when the place had another name."

"Good heavens; he is mad!"

"Mildred didn't think so. It's she who matters, Lilian, do you believe me?"

"No," faltered Lilian, edging towards the door.

He smiled, rather contemptuously.

"Now, Harold," said Lady Peaslake, "go and lie down, there's a good boy. You want rest. Mildred will call you charlatan with reason if you say such silly, such wicked things—good gracious me! He's fainting! Lilian! water from the dining-room! Oh, what has happened? We were all so happy this morning."

The stiff-backed lady re-entered the room, accompanied by a thin little man with a black beard.

"Are you a doctor?" cried Lady Peaslake.

He was not, but he helped them to lay Harold on the sofa. He had not really fainted, for he was talking continually.

"You might have killed me," he said to Lady Peaslake, "you have said such an awful thing. You mean she thinks I never lived before. I know you're wrong, but it nearly kills me if you even say it. I have lived before—such a wonderful life. You will hear—Mildred will say it again. She won't like talking about it, but she'll say it if I want her to. That will save me from—from—from being a charlatan. Where is Mildred?"

"Hush!" said the little man.

"I have lived before—I have lived before, haven't I? Do you believe me?"

"Yes," said the little man.

"You lie," said Harold. "Now I've only to see people and I can tell. Where is Mildred?"

"You must come to bed."

"I don't speak or move till she comes."

So he lay silent and motionless on the sofa, while they stood around him whispering.

Mildred returned in a very different mood. A few questions from her father, followed by a few grave words of rebuke, had brought her to a sober mind. She was terribly in fault; she had nourished Harold's insanity first by encouraging it, then by rebuffing it. Sir Edwin severely blamed her disordered imagination, and bade her curb it; its effects might be disastrous, and he told her plainly that unless Harold entirely regained his normal condition he would not permit the marriage to take place. She acknowledged her fault, and returned determined to repair it; she was full of pity and contrition, but at the same time she was very matter-of-fact.

He heard them return and rushed to meet her, and she rushed to meet him. They met in the long passage, where it was too dark to see each other's faces.

"Harold," she said hurriedly, "I said two dreadful words to you. Will you forgive me?"

She tried to touch him, but he pushed her off with his arm, and said—"Come to the light."

The landlord appeared with a lamp. Harold took it and held it up to Mildred's face.

"Don't!" she said feebly.

"Harold!" called Lady Peaslake. "Come back!"

"Look at me!" said Harold.

"Don't!" said Mildred and shut her eyes.

"Open your eyes!"

She opened them, and saw his. Then she screamed and called out to her father—"Take him away! I'm frightened. He's mad! He's mad!"

Harold said quite calmly, "This is the end."

"Yes," said Sir Edwin, nervously taking the lamp, "now it's bed-time."

"If you think I'm mad," said Harold, "I am mad. That's all it means."

"Go to bed, Harold, to please me."

"Six people say I'm mad. Is there no one, no one, no one who understands?" He stumbled up the passage as if he were blind, and they heard him calling "Tommy."

In the sitting-room he caught his foot in the carpet and fell. When they picked him up, he was murmuring—"Harold can't stand up against six. What is Harold? Harold. Harold. Harold. Who is Harold?"

"Stop him!" cried the little man. "That's bad! He mustn't do that."

They shook him and tried to overtalk him, but he still went on. "What is Harold? Six letters. H.A.R.O.L.D. Harold. Harold. Harold."

"He's fainted again!" cried Lady Peaslake. "Oh, what has happened?"

"It's a sunstroke," said Sir Edwin. "He caught it through sleeping in the sun this afternoon. Mildred has told me all about it."

They took him up and carried him to his room.

As they were undressing him, he revived, and began to talk in a curious, thick voice.

"I was the last to go off the sofa, wasn't I? I counted five go—the wisest first—and I counted ten kinds of wine for certain before I slipped. Your conjurers are poor—but I liked the looks of the flute-girl."

"Go away, dears," said Lady Peaslake. "It's no good our stopping."

"Yes, I liked the flute-girl; is the porter I gave you last week a success?"

"Yes," said the little man, whose cue it was always to agree.

"Well, he'd better help carry me home, I don't want to walk. Nothing elaborate, you know. Just four porters for the litter, and half a dozen to carry the lights. That won't put you out."

"I'm afraid you must stop here for the night."

"Very well, if you can't send me back. Oh, the wine! the wine! I have got a head."

"What is he saying?" asked Mildred through the door.

"Is that the flute-girl?" said Harold raising an interested eye.

Sir Edwin laid hold of him, but he was quite passive, and did not attempt to move. He allowed himself to be undressed, but did not assist them, and when his pyjamas were handed to him, he laughed feebly and asked what they were for.

"I want to look out of the window." They took him to it, hoping that the fresh air would recall his wits, and held him tight in case he tried to leap out. There was no moon, and the expanse of trees and fields was dark and indistinguishable.

"There are no lights moving in the streets," said Harold. "It must be very late. I forgot the windows were so high. How odd that there are no lights in the streets!"

"Yes, you're too late," said the little man. "You won't mind sleeping here. It's too far to go back."

"Too far—too far to go back," he murmured. "I am so sleepy, in this room I could sleep for ever. Too far—too far—oh, the wine!"

They put him into the bed, and he went off at once, and his breathing was calm and very regular.

"A sunstroke," whispered Sir Edwin. "Perhaps a good night's rest—I shall sit up."

But next morning Harold had forgotten how to put on his clothes, and when he tried to speak he could not pronounce his words.

CHAPTER IV.

THEY had a terrible scene with him at the Girgenti railway station next morning when the train came in. However they got him on to it at last, and by the evening he was back at Palermo and had

seen the English doctor. He was sent back to England with a keeper, by sea, while the Peaslakes returned by Naples, as soon as Mildred's health permitted.

Long before Harold reached the asylum his speech had become absolutely unintelligible: indeed by the time he arrived at it, he hardly ever uttered a sound of any kind. His case attracted some attention, and some experiments were made, which proved that he was not unfamiliar with Greek dress, and had some knowledge of the alphabet.

But he was quite blank when spoken to, either in ancient or modern Greek, and when he was given a Greek book, he did not know what to do with it, and began tearing out the pages.

On these grounds the doctors have concluded that Harold merely thinks he is a Greek, and that it is his mania to behave as he supposes that a Greek behaved, relying on such elementary knowledge as he acquired at school.

But I firmly believe that he has been a Greek—nay, that he is a Greek, drawn by recollection back into his previous life. He cannot understand our speech because we have lost his pronunciation. And if I could look at the matter dispassionately—which I cannot—I should only rejoice at what has happened. For the greater has replaced the less, and he is living the life he knew to be greater than the life he lived with us. And I also believe, that if things had happened otherwise, he might be living that greater life among us, instead of among friends of two thousand years ago, whose names we have never heard. That is why I shall never forgive Mildred Peaslake as long as I live.

Most certainly he is not unhappy. His own thoughts are sweet to him, and he looks out of the window hour after hour and sees things in the sky and sea that we have forgotten. But of his fellow-men he seems utterly unconscious. He never speaks to us, nor hears us when we speak. He does not know that we exist.

So at least I thought till my last visit. I am the only one who still goes to see him: the others have given it up. Last time, when I entered the room, he got up and kissed me on the cheek. I think he knows that I understand him and love him: at all events it comforts me to think so.

E. M. FORSTER.

The Hand on the Keys.

THE deft fingers of the business-like, grey-haired little typist pecked at her instrument. At intervals the incessant rattle of the keys gave place to the duller thud of the space-bar after a full stop; then came the heavier swing of the carriage as the shift key threw it back for the capital letter. At last, turning the roller backward for a couple of revolutions, she made a swift correction, then dragged out the sheet of strong, hand-made paper with a brisk k-r-r-r-if of the ratchet, and handed me the last sheet of typescript. "There! it is finished!" she said.

I shook the pages together and ran over the top right-hand corners to see that I had them properly paged. "I hope it hasn't upset your nerves?" I ventured.

It was a ghost story—the usual thing: old castle, four-post bed, dark-framed pictures and so forth; I had, perhaps, a touch of an author's curiosity to know what the effect might have been on this experienced transcriber of other people's fancies. "But you are more than matter-of-fact, you type-writer people," I continued. "What spectre could face the rattle of your keys? No one ever heard of a ghost in a house that contained anything so modern as a writing machine. It would be altogether out of fashion."

"H'm," she replied. "Perhaps."

"Did you ever hear of such a thing?" I insisted, banteringly.

"Well," she replied slowly, seeming to weigh her words, "I would have agreed with you entirely, if it had not been for a—an experience. I have never been able to——" she paused.

"To account for it?" I suggested.

"To avoid accounting for it," was the little grey woman's remarkable answer.

I had risen to go, but I sat down again with an air that made no secret of my desire to be received into Miss Hobson's confidence.

"I'll tell you about it," she said, "on the one condition that

you will accept the story in good faith. Whatever you may think of it, take my word for it that it is true, so far as the evidence of my own senses can guarantee it. I have left off telling people the story," she explained, "because I find that they don't generally take it seriously. They either think I am amusing myself with them, or that I am telling falsehoods. And the thing is, to me, the most solemn experience of my life."

When Miss Hobson had been assured of my entire seriousness she told in the simplest words, without hesitation or adornment, the story which follows.

"When I first took this office," she said, "I worked alone; the other room, in which my two assistants now sit, was my bedroom. One cold night I was sitting in here, because there was no fire in the next room. As I sat reading, and beginning to think it was time to put the gas out and go to bed, I heard the door-bell ring downstairs. Now there was no one else who slept on the premises. All the other rooms in the building were taken up as offices. Consequently, if anyone was to answer the bell, it must be I."

The little grey-haired woman looked me in the face, tapping lightly on the table with her middle finger, just as she might have tapped a key of her typewriter—a frequent gesture with her when she wished to emphasize anything.

"I decided not to answer it," she went on, "and I shouldn't have done so, if the ring had not been repeated two or three times. I was perhaps," she put in, "a little timid. Anyway, I felt nervous when I looked out at the staircase—unlighted, and dark as a pit outside the light from my own door. However, at last I brought a candle, lit it, and went cautiously downstairs. The bell rang again as I reached the top of the first flight.

"When I had released the catch and got the street door open, keeping the candle behind it to avoid the draught, I found there a tall military-looking man, with several severe cuts, not very long healed, across his face. They had an ugly look; yet there was that in his face which made me at once quite unafraid of him. His expression, I will put it to you" (she tapped her table again) "took away my nervousness.

"'Are you Miss Hobson?' he asked, and his voice was the voice of a gentleman.

"I replied that I was.

"'I saw your name on the doorplate; and as there was a light I thought you might by great good fortune be in,' he explained. 'I have been looking anxiously for a lawyer, or at all events for someone who could write out a short document for me.'

“‘But——’ I began: I was going to explain to him that this was not my time for doing business, and to suggest that he should come again, or find himself a solicitor next morning. But he forestalled me. ‘The thing is urgent,’ he said. ‘Delay, even of a night, might be serious; it might mean ruin to—to someone of importance.’

“I looked at him in surprise. He was urgent in his manner and clearly agitated. ‘What do you wish me to do?’ I asked.

“‘To write what I shall dictate, and see me sign it,’ he replied. ‘I am prepared to pay you for the inconvenience.’

“I was not earning very much then, and my rent was heavy, here in Chancery Lane. Yet it was not the money, but something in his urgency, something that I liked in his poor seared face, which decided me.

“‘Come in, then,’ I said. ‘I’ll do it, if I can.’

“He thanked me in a voice that had marked relief in it. We closed the door and I led him upstairs, holding the candle low, that he might not stumble on the strange stairs.

“When we reached my room I gave him a seat, and sat down to the typewriter. He had told me, on the way up, that the document was a short one and would only take a few minutes to dictate. It proved to be—of all things—his will, and I had had enough experience of legal copying to see at once that he knew how to word it. What he dictated to me ran as follows:

“This is the last Will and Testament of me, Henry Truscott Howgego, late Major in the — Regiment. I give and bequeath all property to which I now am or may hereafter become entitled to, to my daughter, Edith Truscott Howgego, address at present unknown, to her absolutely, and I appoint her sole Executrix of this my Will: the said property at present consisting of funds deposited in the name of James Walker in the Standard Bank of South Africa, Cape Town, in circumstances known to the Manager of that Corporation.”

“He was about to dictate the usual attestation-clause when I interrupted him.

“‘I know the form,’ I said, ‘but a will, you know, must be witnessed in the presence of the testator and of each other by two different persons.’

“‘I know,’ he replied. ‘But I suppose there is a caretaker here?’

“For just a moment I mistrusted him. Had this been all a ruse to ascertain that I was really alone in the house, and perhaps to rob, perhaps to kill me? I looked at his face again. With all its scars, with all its ugliness—for he had never been a handsome man—there was a frankness in it which reassured me once more.

"I shook my head.

" 'Well, then,' he said, 'we must call in a cabman from the street.' He had evidently considered the point beforehand.

" 'But why not wait until to-morrow,' I urged, 'one night——'

" 'No!' he said impressively. 'I dare not wait. I am a sick man. At any moment—and it means everything to my girl!'

"I looked at him in some astonishment. This daughter of his, of whose very whereabouts he was ignorant, if she had had time to disappear, must have taken the risk for some days at all events. He seemed to think me entitled to an explanation, and he offered one of the strangest.

" 'I went out with my regiment for the Zulu war—eleven years ago,' he said. 'I was at Rorke's Drift, and was left for dead on the field, at the bottom of a heap of my fellows. These,' he pointed to the scars which hideously disfigured him, 'are not what I got there, however.

" 'What happened to me is a mystery; to no one more so than to myself. The blow I got injured the brain in some way, and my memory has gone. I remember the beginning of the battle. I remember our last stand and the charge of the Zulu impi. I remember, as if it were yesterday, a big, woolly-haired fellow, with an immense buffalo-shield, towering over me with a knob-kerry brandished in his hand. The next thing I remember is waking up in a hospital in Durban, just four weeks ago. I reached London at nine o'clock to-night; you perceive that I have lost no time. How did I get here? I will tell you.

" 'What effect my crack on the head at Rorke's Drift had on the brain, I won't attempt to say. I must have been left for dead, and, in some manner utterly incomprehensible to myself, I must, when I recovered, have made my way down country. But that is not nearly the strangest part of the affair. During the years of which I have lost my memory, I became to all intents and purposes, a totally different person—with a new name and, for aught I know, a new character. I may have been a thief and a robber for all I can say to it! People told me in Durban that I had been known there in the name of James Walker for some years. It was as James Walker that they knew me at the hospital. I appear to have worked in the goldfields and to have made money; for James Walker was rich, I found, and had a fine house and a large banking account. It appears that I made a trip down to Durban two months ago; the train went over an embankment into the spruit below, and I got a second knock on the head—here are the marks of it.' He pointed grimly to the hideous disfigurement of his face.

“‘This second blow appears in some unaccountable manner to have undone what was done by the first—with the Zuluman’s knobkerry. But it also obliterated all recollection of what had occurred in the interval. When I recovered consciousness at Durban—they had identified me as James Walker, of Johannesburg, by my papers—my first words were a shout of encouragement to my men. I supposed myself to be still fighting at Rorke’s Drift! Then, as I realised my surroundings, I decided that the senses must have been knocked out of me in the battle, and that I was now in hospital somewhere at Lord Chelmsford’s base. You must bring yourself to understand that I hadn’t the least suspicion of the time that had passed. All the interval had been cleanly blotted out. Here, I supposed myself to be living in 1879, just after Isandhlwana—just after Rorke’s Drift; but I knew myself again as Major Howgego, not at all as James Walker.

“‘Of course the doctors and nurses thought I was delirious still—I had been raving pretty extensively for the previous ten days—and it was a long time before the truth dawned upon me. When I found that I was James Walker and a rich man, I was dumfounded. But the knowledge also brought with it a fear. I am a man without kith or kin of any sort except my girl Edith—a child of nine at boarding-school when the war broke out. I had nothing but my pay. Her mother, who died at her birth, had been an orphan, friendless and unkinned as myself. What was I to think—I put it to you, Miss Hobson; what was I to think—of what had become of my child? There are cold and hunger here in England!

“‘You can’t be surprised, then, that when I realised that she must be destitute, doctors and nurses couldn’t hold me. They warned me of the danger. They begged me to remain until I could safely travel. But I knew that the danger of what might happen in the event of my dying out there before I could find her, was more desperate than anything that could happen to me after I got home. So I left the hospital, hurried to Cape Town, and interviewed the bank-manager. He knew me well enough—as James Walker—and I had plenty of trouble to make him understand my case. However, I found out what I was worth—it was a large sum—drew some money for my immediate expenses, and rushed for the steamer.

“‘Now you understand why I was in such a hurry to get my will made and witnessed. I might die, Miss Hobson, and my girl——’

“‘But where is she?’ I asked, bewildered by this uncomprehended, still half-realised, story.

"He threw his arms wide. 'Where, indeed! That is what I am to seek.'

"He rose, took the will I had just written from my hands, and ran over it. I lent him my candle, and he fetched a wondering cabman from the street, who, with me, witnessed his signature.

"When the man had gone back to his cab, my visitor said, 'Now, Miss Hobson, I have one more favour to ask. Put this in an envelope and keep it for a while for me. I leave it in your charge. When I have made some arrangements I will send you an address, to which you will forward it. Meantime'—he took out a pocket-book.

"I have told you that I liked the man. For the life of me I couldn't take his money. Eventually, I had my way with him, and showed him downstairs to the expectant cabman. He told the man to drive to some hotel—any hotel, and waved a friendly hand to me as the four-wheeler—he had stopped the first cab that passed—slowly moved off, the horse's hoofs rattling on the asphalt."

"And when did you see him again?" I asked.

"I never saw him again," replied the little grey typewriter.

"Then you never heard the end of the story?"

"The end!" she echoed me. "No. I never heard it. But I saw it."

I waited for the details.

"For the first few days," Miss Hobson resumed, "I kept the will in a closed envelope on my mantelpiece, expecting by every post the address to which I was to send it. After a week had passed, I put it in the type-writer drawer." She pointed to such a drawer beneath the machine. "But when the week drew out into a month, I locked it up in my strong box and, with reluctance, ceased to think of it. You see there was nothing I could do very well. I had simply to wait for orders, that was all. Meantime, there was one's living to get. Yes. By degrees I forgot about it. Other interests arose. My business began to grow. I had plenty to do—plenty to think about.

"About a year after Major Howgego's strange visit, I finally made up my mind that my business would warrant my getting another machine and employing an assistant. I had therefore engaged lodgings for myself in Bloomsbury, and had arranged to have my furniture moved to my new living quarters. After all, it is not very exhilarating to live where one works."

"Over the shop, so to speak."

"Precisely. Well, I had arrived at my last night in the old bedroom, and I was late up packing. It was a terrible night—

dark, moonless, and bitterly, bitterly cold, with snow driving against the windows. Do what I would I couldn't keep warm, and my teeth were chattering. The office—this room—had no light in it except the fire; and that, in my preoccupation with my packing-up, I had allowed to die down.

"Suddenly, as I stood up by the dressing-table at the far end of the bed-room to empty the drawer, I heard a sound in the next room—a click, like the tick of a clock, followed by a slight jar. I started! The house was quiet and I was alone in it. In the large looking-glass before me I could see the blackness of the office reflected through the open door.

"Then—again I heard the click, and the slight jarring noise which followed it. This time I identified the sound easily. *Someone was striking the keys of the type-writer!*

"I was startled: a chill ran over my limbs and I waited with staring eyes for the sound to be repeated. In an instant—perhaps after six or seven seconds—it *was* repeated. Again, after the same interval, I heard it—click, tump!" Miss Hobson imitated with this quaint onomatopœia the sound of her instrument, touching a key, and making the sound she copied as she spoke.

"It went on," she continued, "for perhaps a minute—perhaps ten clicks of the machine, six or seven seconds apart: and there I stood, afraid to move! At last I called out, my voice sounding strange and sharp in the stillness.

"'Who's there?' I said.

"No answer. But the machine clicked again—again—again; always with the same interval of six or seven seconds. Then came a louder, longer sound—the carriage of the typewriter being returned at the end of a line.

"This was more than I could stand. I walked as steadily as I could across the bed-room and into the dark office. The fire had died down so far that it threw hardly any light into the room: the machine was so placed as to be in total darkness. I could just see from the door the faint white shape of the sheet of paper I had left in it.

"As I entered I spoke again, more firmly this time, for I had pulled myself, as one says, together.

"'Who's there at the typewriter?' I said.

"The absolute silence which received my words was indescribably disturbing—it was eerie; but not, no, not for a moment, to be compared with the terrible eeriness of the tick-tump of the machine as another letter was deliberately struck. I tottered to the side of the table and reached out to touch whatever must be

standing there in front of the keys. But my hand, tremblingly outstretched, encountered nothing—nothing but a light, cold draught of air. I groped about to the side—still nothing. Then—tick, tump!—another letter! I grasped at the air over the keys, thinking to seize *its* wrist. But my hand again met sheer emptiness.

“I laid a trap for it. I kept my outstretched hand, palm upwards, on the keys, and waited. It seemed to me that the interval was far, far longer than it had ever been before; but probably my strained terror magnified the impression of time. Anyway, the pause ended at last in the most terrifying manner. I felt a key beneath my knuckles drop down. The type-bar rose and struck its sharp ‘tick’ on the paper. The carriage moved again, and I felt its slight jar shake the machine. Then I turned and ran into the light of the next room, closing the door behind me—between me and my paralysing, dumb terror of what was going on in the darkness.

“But, once safe in my bed-room again, I began to reason with myself. Either my nerves were playing me some trick, and nothing had really happened, only that my own tired mind had deceived me, or else—or else——

“I didn’t care just exactly to say *what* otherwise might be happening. To remain in suspense was, I reflected, not to be thought of. At all costs I must know the truth. So I took my courage in both hands and my candle in one and walked straight across the bed-room, through the door, into the office, and up to the machine, trying to be convinced that my nerves had been playing me a trick.”

“Typewriting must be excessively bad for the nerves,” I commented.

“It is,” she agreed. “But this had, as I found, nothing to do with my nerves, except that it horribly distressed them. As I stood there I saw one of the keys go down—saw the type-bar rise—saw the type strike a sheet of paper which I had left on the roller—saw the carriage ‘jump’ one space!

“I bent down to make sure of what I seemed to see. A light, very cold air seemed to blow in my face—like a very slight draught, but icy cold. Then, once more, touched by no hand, a key was depressed, and another letter added to the scroll. I turned my back and ran again into the bed-room, shutting the door, and threw myself into a chair, trembling, and trying to shut out all sounds from my ears by pressing my fingers into them.

“I must have sat there a long time. You may think me a coward; but if I could have got out without passing through the

office and passing by it again, I would have fled. But to go in there again was more than I dared do.

"Waiting grew monotonous. I took my fingers from my ears and listened. It seemed to me that I listened many minutes. No sound came; but I might, I thought, be exaggerating the time. So I took out my watch. The hand moved with horrible slowness. I gave it five minutes. Nothing! I was sure I could have heard through the door the sound of the machine if it were still being worked; but to reassure myself I went to the keyhole and listened. Still nothing.

"Well—it had stopped. But I dared not go into the office—I simply dared not. I remember that when I turned the key in the door between the two rooms, I turned it softly, afraid to make a sound. So I lay down, without undressing—there seemed to be a sort of security in having one's clothes on—and eventually slept. The strain on my nerves had worn me out. It was daylight when I awoke—the curious glaring daylight that snow reflects. All the roofs outside and the sills of my own window were covered deeply with snow, and snow was still falling. Instead of the usual roar from Holborn, which I was so accustomed to, there was silence, broken now and then by the hoarse sound of drivers' voices, borne across the cold air, now still and full of snowflakes.

"My courage had come again. I unlocked the door and went to the machine, persuaded that I should find confirmation of a hope that had come to me when I first awakened—that I had been overwrought the night before and had merely dreamed. So I went straight to the machine and raised the carriage. I nearly dropped it again when I saw a confusion of letters on the paper. The carriage, as I left the machine, must have been nearly at the end of a line, for the writing began far over to the right. I pulled the paper out and read it.

" 'vcamelfordrddun

gennessstchatham.'

"What did it mean? Suddenly, I saw. Whatever had written this message knew nothing of the typewriter; I recalled the hesitancy with which the writing was executed while I had listened to it over-night. Clearly it knew nothing of the space-bar or the shift-key. Hence all the words were jumbled into one another, and there were no capitals. I separated the words, they gave me this:

" 'v Camelford Rd.

" 'Dungeness St.

" 'Chatham.'

" 'V' I considered had been written for '5.'

"Clearly, the solution of this mystery was the business of the day. I should never be easy until I had found out what number five, Camelford Road, Dungeness Street, Chatham, had to tell me.

"I went off as soon as I was dressed, and had my breakfast at Lyons'—near the Holborn corner. Then I sought out the carman whom I had engaged to remove my furniture, and told him he must postpone the business for a day. I went next to Bloomsbury, to apprise my new landlady of this delay, and passing the British Museum, had the forethought to go into the reading-room, get out Kelly's Directory of Kent and Surrey, and ascertain that Chatham did actually contain a Camelford Road off Dungeness Street. The Directory, however, showed me nothing as to who lived there. It appeared to be a small street with no shops in it, and most of the numbers were missing from the list. I caught the first train starting for Chatham—it took a long time to get down there, what with the heavy snow, and the chronic paralysis of the railway that serves that part of the country—and I was so cold and depressed by the time the train did, with reluctance, arrive at Rochester, that I got out there and was glad to walk the distance between the two places, and thus get my blood into circulation again.

"The rest is soon told, remarkable as what I was to discover proved to be. Camelford Road was a mean thoroughfare, conspicuous for squalor and general unwholesomeness, even in Chatham. In every sense, it was in the lowest part of Chatham—low as to its situation, low as to its population. Only when I found myself in front of number five—a small ramshackle, and crowded house, with a door ajar to the dirty passage, did the difficulty of my position suggest itself to me. What was I to do when I got there? Clearly I couldn't present my little scrap of bad typewriting and demand an explanation of it. I had (I realised) come, after all, on a sort of wild goose chase.

"Still, I couldn't give up my task, and profiting by the exit of a dirty-faced girl of perhaps fifteen, I put a question.

" 'Who lives here?' I inquired.

"The girl eyed me with distrust and parried smartly.

" 'Are you the School Board?' she asked defiantly.

"No. I was not the School Board. I merely wanted to know the names of the people. By an inspiration I took out my purse and gave the girl sixpence; she received it with avidity, but she still seemed suspicious.

" 'Wod yer want ter know for?' she asked.

“ ‘Not to do anyone any harm,’ I said. ‘I’m not going to get anyone into trouble; I promise you that.’

“ ‘Well,’ she said, telling off the house on the fingers of an unclean hand: ‘there’s Mrs. Bowen in the basement, two children an’ a ’usband wot gets tight and sloshes ’er: then there’s Mrs. Green in the ground floor—two rooms—’er wot takes the rent: first floor front, ole Joe, I dunno wot ’e does: first floor back, a new fambly wot I dunno the names of: second floor front, hus,’—she seemed to think her own illustrative appearance a sufficient description: ‘an’ the attic, Miss Howgego wot——’

“I must have shown by some movement my surprise at this. This odd, unforgettable name of course sprang to my recollection; and the girl’s guttersnipe acuteness instantly detected my recognition of it.

“ ‘Is it ’er wot you want?’ she asked swiftly.

“I nodded. The spokeswoman of the ‘us’ family slowly wagged her representative head up and down. ‘You’ve only jest got ’ere in time!’ she said, with an air of one who witnesses a narrow escape. ‘She’s goin’ she is! She’s a packin’ up of ’er things now; I heard her. She works at the dressmaking.’

“I didn’t wait for more, but pushed open the door and made my way up rickety stairs to the top of the house. A low voice said ‘Come in’ to my knock, and I found myself in presence of a pale-faced, slender girl, in a patched dress, very neat, but cheap and much worn. She was kneeling beside a battered yellow tin trunk, painted blue inside, and filling it from a heap of under-clothing which lay beside it. The floor was uncarpeted, and the room contained nothing else but a ‘stump’ bed, a box covered with black linen and serving as a dressing table, a cane-bottomed chair, and a wash-stand, furnished with a tin jug and basin.

“ ‘Miss Howgego?’ I said interrogatively.

“She stood up and came towards me. ‘Yes,’ she replied; her next question surprised me by its matter-of-fact welcoming tone.

“ ‘I suppose you have come from my father?’ she said.

“I replied, ‘Not exactly; but your father left something for you with me a year ago. I have come to—to verify your address.’

“ ‘Then you are not the person whom he said he would send for me?’ she inquired, disappointed. I was startled. ‘No,’ I said. ‘When did you see him?’

“ ‘Why—last night’ she replied, her face lighting up again. ‘He—he found me last night, you know,’ she added, as if that explained everything—indeed, as the case happened, it did.

“ ‘Where is he?’ I asked her.

“‘I don’t know!’ she replied, ‘he is coming for me to-day.’

“‘Well then, you don’t know where you are going?’ I ventured.

“She shook her head. ‘Have you brought me what it was my father gave you for me?’ she asked, looking puzzled again.

“‘Not here,’ I said. ‘It is at my office. But the best thing, since you cannot give me an address, is that I should give you mine. It was a document,’ I added. ‘It was his will!’

“‘Oh——’ she paused on the word. I was glad that she did not ask me for an explanation of my presence there, and precisely then. ‘But it doesn’t matter now,’ she said, and her gentle face—it had all her father’s candour, but joined, as I began to realise, with a tender loveliness that must have been her dead mother’s. ‘It doesn’t matter any more. You see we have found each other! We are to be always together now! I have waited for him so long, and been so miserable. I thought he was dead, you know. And now he is alive again, and we are always to be together. My life is to be altogether happy.’

“She delighted me. I would have loved to kiss her. ‘Well,’ I said, ‘here is my address.’ I gave it to her on my card. ‘If you want me you know where to find me. But I am so glad you have found him,’ I added. She put out her hand, and I shook it as I left her—my heart misgiving me; for here was no explanation of *my* perplexity, here was no solution for me—I had not found him.

“This misgiving was only too well justified; you have probably foreseen what, next day, I learned.

“He had indeed found her, after a year’s seeking, walking over from Sittingbourne where she had lived before coming into Chatham, and whither he had tracked her the day before. He only reached her late at night, and their glad reunion kept them up late. Finding at the station, when he had at last left her, that there would be no train calling at Sittingbourne that night, he had started out, in spite of the snow-storm, to walk the ten miles or so to the inn where he had put up. Confused by the snow, on a strange road, he must have lost himself; for it was in the middle of a field, far off the turnpike, that they found him next morning at about eight o’clock, dead.

“The doctors said he must have been dead nine or ten hours. I remembered, when I read the account of the inquest in the papers, that my little American clock struck eleven just after I had locked myself into the bedroom the previous night.”

T. B. RUSSELL.

The Little Gods.

"SINCE you ask me," said Kitty LeMarchand, "I suppose I believe in nothing, either in heaven or earth; not even in luck. If I make a fool of myself, I expect to pay for it—in a greater or less degree, not necessarily in accordance with the offence. But what have gods, upper or lower, to do with it? Cause and effect, cause and effect: you hear it drumming on all through life; sometimes in absurd disproportion, which makes us poor mortals greatly daring. Is your *credo* so very different, Jim?"

Aldgate gazed into the fire.

"I—don't know," he said at last. "How on earth did we get into this discussion, Kitty? Yes; I admit I believe in certain—what can you call them?—'influences.' I am not so completely steeped in scepticism as you."

"Then India hasn't done for you what it has for me," said Lady LeMarchand. "I suppose you didn't go through my violent reaction. Remember I went straight out there from my convent—such a holy little kid!—and I thought my eyes would never stop opening. Then there were other religions all round me, just as real to their adherents as mine was to me. I began to think, and at last I saw: all the difference lay in the strata of civilisation; it was a matter of development. Evolution was the only force that separated their 'tinkly temple bells' from our clanging convent *cloche*. Then, like everything else, I suddenly began to evolute amazingly, to roll out, as it were; I married, and—behold me! But what do you mean by your 'influences,' Jim? Have you turned Theosophist?"

Aldgate laughed rather awkwardly.

"You will say rather that I have reverted to paganism. If you want to hear my one definite belief, you must prepare to listen to what will sound like an astonishing amount of rot. Have you ever heard of the 'little gods'?"

Kitty LeMarchand stared at him.

"I can see you haven't; and, as a matter of fact, I believe it is my special name for them. Well, once upon a time"—he laughed

an apology for the absurdity of his creed—"in the Italy of Romulus and the Greece of Homer, there were certain little rustic gods. There were Nymphs in the brooks, and Fauns in the caves; Pan played his pipes in the woodland, kindly disposed unto the shepherds; Satyrs were ubiquitous in the forests, if anyone had chosen to look for them. But that precisely did not happen. One and all led harmless, natural existences, often beneficial in little, unseen ways to mortals; but—there was something sinister; something that clung to them from their dark abodes: mystery, if you like. And for him who chanced upon them unawares, there was always fear, *panic* fear, the dominating, unreasonable desire to flee. Are you beginning to see?"

"Jim, you are extraordinary," said Lady LeMarchand.

"You are the only soul to whom I have ever unburdened such nonsense. Do you want to hear more?" Kitty nodded. "Listen, then. After a time, the people lost faith in their childish belief; there were douches of cold philosophy; black-robed priests arrived, who painted the ancient deities as sheer devils, of whom it was anathema even to speak. In other words, they were old-fashioned. The little gods took umbrage: they still had left to them their fear-compelling power, but their odour of sanctity had begun to smell suspiciously of brimstone. In Greece and Italy they had been revered; anywhere they could be feared. Now that all lands were made alike to them, they slowly began to scatter, east, west, south, and north. I met one of them in the Sihna pass."

"*What?*" cried Lady LeMarchand.

"My dear Kit, I warned you I was going to talk nonsense. I think it must have been a very small one, but it almost brought about my ruin. It was in the Tirah campaign, and a small detachment of us were encamped for the night. We had no very certain intelligence of the enemy's whereabouts, but there was no special cause for alarm—and I do not suppose I am reckoned to be an extraordinarily nervous man. I had been my rounds, found everything quiet and in order, and had settled down for sleep. I saw nothing; heard nothing. Quite suddenly the terror gripped me. Heaven knows how you would explain it: a beastly funk is more an appellation than a scientific definition. I sat up shivering with fear, of what, of whom, I never even asked myself; but it was all I could do, literally holding myself down until the blessed dawn, not to give the order for instant retreat. The darkness—Good Lord, what a night!" Aldgate sprang up suddenly, and paced the room. "I felt it once again at Cairo, sitting up with a sick man, who was talking foolish—but not so

bad; thank heaven—not so bad! Mind: I'm not singular in this I've known scores of men who have confessed to the same sort of experience, and probably scores of others who never will confess."

"But why drag in your little gods?" asked Lady LeMarchand "Isn't it simply a question of temperament?"

Aldgate shook his head. "Not panic. It isn't part of a personality. It is neither subjective nor objective: sometimes it has no object; sometimes, even in a cholera camp, it is out of all proportion to its object; it is entirely an influence from outside. From the beginning I believe the ancients recognised unreasoning fear as something that had an existence apart from mortals, making impartially for destruction or salvation, and for that reason I invoked the assistance of the little gods to extricate my meaning. Hence the rigmarole with which I bored you at first."

His companion was unconvinced.

"You are very persuasive, Jim," she said, "but I can't pretend I am converted. I cling to my theory of temperament and circumstance. I don't believe in outside influences: you and I are the only credible facts in this world. I have never been afraid in my life: my nerves are strong as steel, and only illness would affect them. While I am in health, I challenge your little gods to do their worst. Do you think they will accept it?"

"Take care! Take care!" laughed Aldgate.

"I will," returned Lady LeMarchand. "I shall watch my symptoms with exceeding interest. Shall I begin, do you suppose, by trembling at poor old Dick? By the way, I wonder where he is. Have you any idea of the special function for to-day—Assizes, County Council, Board of Guardians? It always annoys him that I am still unable to distinguish one from the other."

"Guardians, I rather fancy," said Aldgate. "Do you know, I was a little surprised to find Dick so thoroughly in his element down here. He doesn't seem in the least to regret the Service: his magisterial and various commissioner's duties appear all-sufficing. Wasn't it a trifle amazing to you at first?"

"I don't think he was ever really keen on the army," Lady LeMarchand replied. "He was glad, honestly, of the chance to send in his papers. He loves the salutations in the market-place: the fact of being 'Sir Richard' to all men. To be quite candid, it is an attitude with which I haven't the slightest sympathy: I can't work up any enthusiasm, when it is a question of killing the calf before it is fatted. What earthly good is a title without money? Look at this place! We seem to have inherited the dilapidations of half a county, without even the tantalising

retrospect of past glories to feast our eyes upon. No one could accuse the poor old uncle of prodigality; he simply sank under the gravity of un-let farms, rents that were never paid, the accumulated results of agricultural depression. Behold our heritage!" Kitty LeMarchand gave an unspeakably weary laugh. "How I hate it all! As long as we were in the Service I didn't in the least mind being poor: everyone was as hard up as ourselves; but now to drive about in a shabby brougham, driven by an antique horse with two feet in the grave and the others crooking to the cab-stand, grates upon one's sense of the fitness of things."

"Poor little woman," said Aldgate, and Kitty shrugged her shoulders.

"I suppose I shall get resigned to it eventually: at the sacrifice of spirits perhaps, but not of health. I can see myself as a horribly sane, sound old lady, still paddling about those disgusting lanes, still inhabiting this hideous drawing-room, still surviving those frumpish wool-work chairs. Shades of Dick's ancestress, who worked them! Don't they conjure up visions of respectability, unlimited, sluggish, absolute? I feel myself crushed under its dead weight."

"Have you noticed," asked Aldgate, "how curiously on the same lines Dick's and my lives have run? We are almost exactly the same age, were at Sandhurst together, gazetted to the same regiment, and later—too late for me, thanks to my consistent luck—both fell in love with the same woman."

"Don't!" said Lady LeMarchand.

"To continue the parallel," said Aldgate, "at the same time we both inherited undesirable properties, which are like to ruin us. But whereas Dick can stay at home to nurse his into a semblance of prosperity, mine means sheer exile: a distinction with a well-defined difference."

Kitty walked to the fireplace, and grasping the tall mantel-shelf with her hands, looked between them into the fire.

"Not till next year," she said.

Aldgate rose also.

"My dear little lady, in another fortnight. It is no use blinking facts: I have told you that, even in Ceylon, tea plantations cannot be left to look after themselves. You know that I had a cable to say the manager had suddenly died; it is extremely improbable that I shall be able to afford such an experienced man again, and at all events my presence out there in the meantime is imperative. Whether it is for good and all, I cannot say."

Kitty poked a log farther into the blaze with the point of her small elaborate shoe.

"Then you won't be here for Christmas?"

"On the high seas," said Aldgate.

A silence fell, which the tinkling of the cinders in the grate and the restive dance of shadows in the fire-light, seemed to emphasise. Lady LeMarchand turned with a sudden gesture of appeal.

"For God's sake, Jim, take me with you! I—I can't stand it here. Oh, the winter, with the cold, and the mud, and those awful people, who think me fast and horrid! I couldn't, I couldn't, without you. Take me with you! You asked me to come once, and I wouldn't. Now I fling myself at you, Jim!"

She threw out her hands to him in desperate entreaty, and he took them in his own.

"Don't, little woman! That you should ask me, beg me for anything—Dick's wife—heavens, what a sweep I am! My dear, don't cry. How can you come with me? Remember, at Marat, three years ago, you counted the cost, and found it wasn't worth it. Believe me, you were right; I have proved it for myself since then. Women can make life a hell for those who throw aside conventions. How can I ask you again?"

"I ask,"—Lady LeMarchand broke in upon his words feverishly—"this time *I* ask; this time I know. What do other women matter? I should be out of their power: out of this odious corner of the world, into the glorious East again. Jim, don't you care for me? Don't you want me? Do you mean to go without me?"

For answer, she found herself caught and held; in a bondage that comprehended the things of life and death. For one exultant minute Kitty LeMarchand tasted to the full the sweets of power and of triumph: then she wrenched herself away,

"Take care! I hear someone—Dick has come back. When do you sail—Thursday week? Wait; we can write."

Sir Richard's step, resonant of responsibilities and functions punctually performed, was audible in the hall; he entered the room with tidings of board-room speeches, committees of relief, and elections of union officials; accepting as a matter of course the *tête-à-tête* he was accustomed to find within. He discovered an audience responsive, and, at the due moments, ejaculatory. It was not he, but Kitty, who breathed a sigh of relief when Aldgate rose to go at the end of a decorous quarter of an hour; he was genuinely sorry to hear of Jim's approaching departure, and accompanied his visitor to the door, watching him mount in the

twilight for the five-mile ride which intervened before he could arrive at his destination: the comfortable home of an elderly relative, who was conveniently uninterested in her nephew's comings and goings.

Sir Richard enlarged on the topic, when he re-entered the drawing-room.

"Hard luck on poor old Aldgate, having to cut all his connexions."

"With only the consolation of unlimited tea—in the rough," his wife replied indifferently.

Each day that followed bore the impress of a curious experience for Kitty, and thus was not without its element of charm to her special temperament. With unconscious callousness, she dissected Dick's character, and examined each trait by the unfavourable light of comparison. It became an exquisite refinement of pleasure to be bored by accounts of local, agricultural and mayoral dinners. The spell of contrast was over all: as she listened, she felt already the moving waters of the Mediterranean beneath her feet; somewhere there was music; and for her the whole universe contained but three salient features: herself, Aldgate, and the stars.

Meanwhile, without the exercise of any special control, affairs began to drift conveniently for Kitty. Aldgate had arranged to cross from Dover on the 30th, and join the P. and O. boat at Marseilles; on the preceding afternoon Kitty would meet him in town; a few days before, business summoned Sir Richard to London, and although he would return on the evening of the 30th, his wife's absence would be sufficiently explained by her acceptance of a hypothetic invitation to visit a cousin in the north.

LeMarchand's departure was the signal for much restrained activity. For the first time Kitty rejoiced that restrictions of income did not allow a maid to superintend her packing: the thin garments she unwrapped to fold anew, conjured up visions of colour, refulgent and glowing of the East, which had little in common with the level deadness of existence at Horsbury.

Her thoughts went out in a passionate rush of gratitude and affection to Aldgate, in whom she perceived the emblem of all deliverance. Such as were the *veteris vestigia flammæ*, they rose in Lady LeMarchand's heart, enkindling sensations and emotions unknown to her before.

A white frost and a blue, but hazy sky, accompanied her quiet leave-taking, making transiently beautiful the lanes through which she drove. Her train was late: "A thick fog in London,"

the station-master told her; and she could scarcely restrain the exclamation "Delightful!" at an occurrence which would serve to emphasise once more the contrast of present and future. She entered her compartment with the resolve to mark each moment of her journey with a white stone; a kind of mental diary, for Aldgate's benefit, of sentiments of relief, hope, and joy.

It was not necessary to take one backward glance at Horsbury: it seemed to Kitty that a nightmare vision would remain with her for ever of the little squat church, where Sunday by Sunday Dick stumbled through the lessons; of the mud-encircled Vicarage, where lived their nearest neighbours; of their own stuccoed, shabby house, a mile off, whose early-Victorian hideousness had eaten into her soul for two whole years.

How had she survived it? She, whose wit, audacity, and brilliance had been the centre of the gay little Indian station: whose social qualities had scandalised half an English county? For relief, she speedily reverted to the contrast, grouping her subject with artistic dexterity into bold masses of black and white. Jim's ready laugh of appreciation rang in her ears; his smile thrilled her; she remembered the mutual, intuitive sympathy, in matters great or small, which had always characterised their intercourse.

What would Horsbury say to a six years' intrigue? How it would pity Dick! To outstrip remorse, she whipped her pride to the sharp contempt of quick-witted woman for slow-witted man: how could she go on driving tandem to her husband's carrier's trot? Surely, it might be accounted unto her for righteousness that she had waited eight years for him on the road—in impotent longing to be overtaken. These were the finer ethics of judgment, likely to be omitted from the verdict of surrounding squires.

Her heart went out to the unfortunate women she had left behind. She was a pioneer into lands where they would not venture to follow; she was opening their eyes to a "vision beautiful," whose realisation was unutterable to them. Kitty LeMarchand was a law unto herself. She had the boldness to dare; the energy to do; the audacity to rebel against the passive rusting-out of all her forces, intellectual and physical.

Struck by a sudden thought, she sprang to her feet, and peered into the mirror set mid-way in the carriage. Its dingy surface sent back the reflection of a peculiarly bright and vivid face, radiant with health. She breathed a sigh of deep relief: Horsbury had, at all events, robbed her of no whit of the one possession she now had left; if anything, the restful existence

had softened the lines of a somewhat over-anxious prettiness. From the beginning of the world women with good looks like hers came *et dona ferentes*; she would not go altogether empty-handed to Jim.

Lady LeMarchand consulted her watch; forty-five minutes had passed, and in another two hours she would be with Aldgate. Already a slight greyness in the atmosphere indicated the fog that lay beyond; low-lying meadows swam in white mist, and the distant hills were blurred in outline. The cold crept, an unseen but almost tangible presence, into the carriage, and, in spite of her furs, Kitty shivered. She drew off her gloves, rubbing one numbed hand against the other, removing her rings to aid the returning circulation. She slipped them off, a little heap of brilliance, on to the cushion by her side, and as she did so, an emerald half-hoop caught her eye. It was a LeMarchand heirloom, which she had worn ever since her husband had inherited the property. Now she had no longer any right to it; she ought to have left it with the remainder of the set in the jewel case, whose key she intended to send to Dick. She must return it with the key—and her wedding-ring?

She took up the plain gold band, and for one moment thought dramatically of flinging it from the window, so that the speeding train might hurry her for ever from this last relic of her past. A more sober thought dictated its restoration, and she dropped it into her pocket. How curiously bare her finger looked bereft of it! Wearing it, she was Dick's wife; without it, she was—an ambiguity, something indefinite, lacking appellation. As this nameless entity, she was going to Aldgate; with a vague sense of impotence, she realised that to reform her equivocal position lay neither in his nor her power, but in LeMarchand's.

Of course, Dick would apply for a divorce—and the petition would go undefended. She hoped that he would proceed quickly, and that the necessary evil of publicity would not be long dragged out. With all her protested indifference to conventions, she was too quick-witted not to realise that putting her creed into practice would be disadvantageous. She had no liking for the rôle of pariah; she trusted to the world's appreciation of a pretty and delightful woman to extend charity for a *faux pas*, repaired almost as soon as committed. And of course Dick would apply for a divorce.

For the first time a chill of doubt assailed her. She had heard once of a man, who, loving his wife with a passionate devotion, had refused, when she left him, to annul their marriage, hoping in vain for her return. Dick's careless affection was not of that type;

but from sheer slackness and distaste he might postpone an unpleasant business until the weeks became months, and the months became years.

Kitty tried to banish the thought as beyond probability; but it recurred again and again with an insistence which at last forced her to seek refuge in suggestions of compensation. Surely, the attachment between herself and Aldgate would outweigh such minor social ills as might accrue? Since they were everything to each other, could not the world be accounted as nothing in their scheme of mutual egotism?

Lady LeMarchand rose and paced the carriage. All around fog and the on-coming twilight combined to make a darkness more gloomy and obscure than any starless night. It enwrapped and enveloped the train, so that the throbbing engine seemed to be carrying her inexorably onward to some dim, chaotic region she had not intended to explore. She, whose will was wont to be paramount, seemed suddenly to have forfeited all power of volition, surrendering herself soul and body to ulterior forces. With an effort she steadied herself, and resuming her seat, pulled the rug around her.

Was not Jim worth any sacrifice? Or could that, indeed, be considered a sacrifice, which received in exchange protection, companionship and love? Resist them, defend herself against them as she might, on came the rush of answering thoughts: what she was giving was eternal, that which could neither be recovered or restored; his gifts might be ephemeral and easily withdrawn. Was it good for any man to have such mastery?

The train was gradually nearing the great London terminus, indicating its approach by frequent and weary stops, and the crash of fog-signals on the line. Below the carriage windows, fires scattered at intervals made the mists glow red, and occasional figures passed, to be instantly swallowed up in blackness. The tumult without, contrasted with the quiet and loneliness within, confused Kitty's thoughts; she knew that she trusted Aldgate absolutely, that her confidence in him remained unshaken; but, on the other hand, the motive and mainspring of their action was an emotion that was, of its nature, transitory.

Her own life rose up before her in irrefutable testimony. Once she had loved Dick; that lay in the limbo of dead experiences: now she loved Aldgate, for how long? And how could she reckon in him on the continuity of a sentiment that she herself had proved fastidious and short-lived? She did not doubt his outward constancy and faithful protection; but she shrank from the idea of a concealed fatigue, the carefully subdued weariness of a

lifetime. Her breath came quickly; she was unstrung by the excitement of the last few days: in one minute she would see Jim, and the first glimpse of him would render her agitation ridiculous, and restore her assurance.

The train came slowly to a halt, and Lady LeMarchand stepped on to the platform. Perplexing in the obscurity, greetings and farewells on all sides assailed her ears; electric lamps made little islands of light in the darkness, of no avail to pierce the gloom, or to distinguish amid the crowds that thronged the station; for the first time the discovery of Aldgate presented itself as a problem. Even as the thought entered her brain, she almost collided with a man in a long travelling ulster. He was looking away from her expectantly down the long rank of carriages, and the transient gleam of a torch revealed Jim's face.

Incontinently Lady LeMarchand fled; pushing, threading a path to the subway, seized by a fear she did not attempt to analyze. Her one idea was to escape; to avoid a fate that threatened dangers, unknown, sinister beyond all experience. The sudden glare of a booking-office arrested her; she hesitated, rapidly demanded a ticket and sped on. Instinct, rather than knowledge, guided her to the desired platform; fortune, rather than calculation, decreed that the Horsbury train should be nearly an hour over-due in starting. Heedless of all considerations of luggage, and breathless from her mad rush, she climbed the steps of the nearest compartment. The engine shrieked; panted; moved. Alone in blessed solitude Kitty LeMarchand buried her face in her hands and broke into hysterical sobs of relief.

At the next stop more passengers entered, and forced her to preserve, at least, the outward appearance of composure. Each throb of the express made tranquillity easier, and gave security. She leant back in her corner with closed eyes. The events of the afternoon seemed like some wild dream; her mind was a blank to all but the present. The banalities of her fellow-travellers produced the impression of a delightful commonplaceness; she no longer rose in extraordinary flights, or explored dark abysses; she felt her feet once more on level ground, herself a sane sound mortal.

Kitty's self-control was established, but she experienced an utter fatigue. The violent reactions of the afternoon culminated in an acutely aching head, and, exhausted by the pain, she made no attempt to give coherence to her thoughts, or to account for the succession of emotions which had compelled her return. The

cool night air of Horsbury, greeting her at the opening of the carriage, was salutary: without perplexity she could make inquiries for her missing boxes, despatch telegrams, and secure a fly for her conveyance home.

Her absolute calmness imposed even upon herself. Surely these eccentric proceedings had no real part in her existence, nor ever seriously threatened its settled order? In contradiction to her delusion came the rush of gratitude with which she welcomed the hideous portals of the Grange: gates of respectability and safety, through which no rebels were admitted.

LeMarchand met her in the hall, and, bracing herself to the inevitable, Kitty laid her head upon his shoulder.

"Dear Dick, behold a helpless fool! I have lost my luggage, come straight back instead of going to Jessica's, and all because I was frightened by the fog! What do you think of me?"

LeMarchand drew her to the fire, extending her hands to the blaze.

"Poor little woman! A beastly pea-souper, wasn't it? You look quite white and ill. Why, Kitty! I thought you were never afraid."

With an abrupt movement Lady LeMarchand stooped for her gloves, which lay strewn upon the floor. Unrecalled until that moment, scattered fragments of Aldgate's words returned to her.

"Don't challenge the little gods . . . Take care . . . Panic isn't part of a temperament . . . I tell you unreasoning fear is an influence from outside, and makes impartially for destruction—or for salvation."

CHRISTINE D. T. HILLS.

Yggdrasil.

O FRIEND, how swift the autumn leaves are falling,
 Touched by Death's hand in passing, cold and chill;
 The white mists creep and cling around the hill,
 The sad-voiced robins through the dusk are calling,
 Their plaintive voices piping overhead
 Like ghosts of joys now dead among the dead.

From the great tree of life how swiftly shaken
 Fall the dead days to silence, one by one,
 No more to be revived by any sun.
 The vanished days that Time has overtaken,
 Dropt for the wind to whirl in eddying streams
 Round the dim meadows of the land of dreams.

Deep in the earth the great trees' roots have drifted
 Down in the silence of the graves below,
 And far above our heads the branches show
 Into the silence of the stars uplifted;
 And we—we wrangle out our noisy days
 Betwixt two silences, a little space.

The leaves fall, yet the great tree standeth ever,
 The Autumn comes for us, but yet the Spring
 Renews her leafy bowers where thrushes sing
 And little summer breezes stir and shiver;
 While over us and our forgotten pain
 The lilies sway, the roses bloom again.

What comfort, friend? When we are clean forgotten,
Gliding grey ghosts beside unlovely streams,
Shall we have any profit of the dreams
That stirred our hearts long since, those dreams begotten
Of storm and sunshine, in the little strife
That made the fleeting moments of our life?

Ah me! The days draw in, the daylight darkens:
But echoing clear through all the mists of Time
Bells ringing somewhere a celestial chime
Bring tidings all divine, and whoso hearkens
Knows that his life and all its storm and stress
Ends not in silence and forgetfulness.

So, though the darkness comes and tempests scatter
The life-tree's leaves to all the winds that blow,
We toiling out our little tasks below
Know there is something still no storm can shatter,
Some hidden soul within that cannot die,
Stretching blind hands towards eternity.

S. CORNISH WATER S.

Mark Stafford's Wife.

I.

I HAD promised her mother, blindly, as one makes such promises, to "look after" Kate, but never found myself quite fitted for the task.

To say that, at the outset, there were moments when she seemed to hang between two worlds, is to make her out less brightly human than she was, but now and then she gave a hint of unreality, or rather of intangibility, which set me wondering how she was equipped to meet those problems which present themselves to most young women of remarkable attraction and substantial fortune, in the course of time.

If she had been, as she was said to be, a perfect copy of my beautiful dead friend, that would have turned the key on all perplexities, but as it was, the likeness ended with her face. The rare tranquillity which had reflected faithfully her mother's temperament, with Kate served merely to screen off an unsuspected fire. One knew it there; one couldn't know what it was burning or might burn, that reticent little flame, so hidden that it was common for a certain coldness and inanimation to be noted as her chief distinction or defect.

She made the most of her reputation, she lived up to it, partly, no doubt, believed in it; at any rate she liked us all to take this view. It was her pose, though no one ever posed less consciously, to despise the stuff of dreams; yet I believe she walked sometimes clad wholly in that gossamer; the air of gay indifference, almost of insensibility, which she perversely wore, while it imposed on casual spectators, remained for me an exquisite mask, a thin protection possibly, but unreliable as unrealities invariably are. If anyone had ventured to remind her how excessively romantic the real Katharine Belton was, she would have given him the lie with fine effect—refuted such a calumny as stoutly to herself as to her accuser's face.

No one can smile more readily than she, poor child, would once

have smiled at this presentment of what she was pleased to call her "simple self."

"You know, dearest duenna," she would say, "you take amazing pains to make a puzzle of me. I can see you turning the inoffensive picture upside down to find poor Napoleon standing by his tomb. He isn't there!"

But it was just this sense of some intention in the picture missed, that made her difficult, even dangerous, to touch.

Her splendid health seemed a sufficient spell against the fashionable curse of nerves. I no more dreaded them for Kate, than I dreaded kleptomania. She was beautifully sound; but in her very soundness there was the suggestive quality of flawless glass, a frailness, a transparency, even a hardness of the finer sort. She would never, under a strain, I fancied, slowly and pitifully fail, but simply break. At her mother's death, one of the cruellest endings to a gentle life, though they had lived entirely in and for each other, she went through those indescribable days with something like a smile, a bright and, as I thought, unnatural sanity; until, going one evening with some message to her room, I learnt how terribly for Kate the night undid the day. From that moment I feared really nothing for her but the test of her own extraordinary self-control.

Afterwards, at once, she wished to travel, not under my wing I plainly understood, but with someone more remote from immediate memories, who hadn't cared and didn't know.

With more reluctance than I showed, I let her go, nominally in charge of a lively American widow, who was not, as she put it, "one of those terribly concrete creatures who can't see that a tree will make a table," and who proposed to develop her companion on the newest lines with "rollicking success." I was not alarmed, and submitted to their long silences and a certain freedom in their choice of people and of places as part of the adventure. After nine months' absence, Kate returned—avowedly "penitent and improved." She no longer evaded, she declared, the guardianship of angels, and to put herself in the way of it, agreed to come and live under my roof, at my suggestion; childless and solitary woman that I was, she seemed to throw back the shutters of the long-closed house, letting in patches of the bluest sky, freshening it with a rush of youthful air, and opening my doors to all sorts of charming people, for whom she displayed so admirable an impartiality, that before I had well begun to take the measure of their assiduity or to buckle on my shining armour for their benefit, behold! under my heedless eye, she had become engaged to Charlie Darch.

They had foreseen, these two young people, they protested with confident effrontery, that I was capable of producing some sober, gifted and impossibly eligible person, and in view of such a blunder, to spare me and the shadowy fourth our disillusionment, had settled it themselves.

Prepared perhaps for eventful surprises, I had meanwhile been negligently trusting in a kindly guiding star; and that it was now shining over a young man of no particular brilliance or distinction, did not disquiet me.

Charlie Darch was a surprise but by no means a disaster. For my ideal he was too young, and at first I was inclined to look on him as a nice enough, but rather plain, unvarnished fact. On a nearer view, however, there was a pleasing side to his honest unpretentiousness, his lack of the modern intellectual veneer.

He was so modestly aware that he wasn't, as he phrased it, "showy," and his recognition that Kate, in "putting up" with him, was missing chances infinitely showier was touchingly sincere.

"I'm not, and of course I know it," he said in his literal way, "your notion, or anywhere near it—of what Kate might have done. She might have done, it's easily understood, immensely better, except," he added simply, "that I can't believe any man could think so much of her, or be more bent on giving her, every way, his best. I daresay she seems to you, like a delicate bit of china put into rather clumsy hands, not at all, in fact, into the hands of a connoisseur; but you've no idea how tremendously careful and considerate and all that, I shall be. You'll see."

This was, I think, the only profession he ever made to me. A thing once said and done, with him was apt to be dismissed as needing no retrospect nor reinforcement. He was, as became his youth, a little final, and I had imagined that for me at any rate he would probably stand still. But he advanced. Once on the road to your goodwill, he made his way; you liked him better, found it easier to believe in, to accept him; and not difficult, as time went on, to discover that he shone, though unobtrusively, in human dealings. He got rough but remarkably good impressions; he was apt to catch them instinctively from the sunny side and to be, too, very prompt and positive in his judgment and decisions and appreciations.

Only in one instance he was noticeably vague. He had met Mark Stafford at my house; we had presented our celebrity, not perhaps without some flourishes, and Darch's view of him seemed singularly indistinct; he slipped in speaking of him

behind borrowed phrases and struck persistently the impersonal note. His mind—if it was clear to him in this particular—remained for us a perfect smudge.

Stafford was then emerging steadily, though "The Forest and the Market Place" had yet to make its memorable stir. Kate had come across him at Mentone; later he found us out in London and came to frequent our little weekly "At Homes" with, I was told, a flattering regularity. He made a point of being very nice to Darch. He liked him, he explained, for what he called his bold indifference to subtleties, his breadth of line. "And incidentally, perhaps," he said, "because he hasn't read, and doesn't mean to read, our precious books. He's splendidly illiterate; his scorn of current values is a real distinction."

I wasn't so distinguished. I had submissively run through Mark Stafford's books and didn't care for them. They gave me too much the idea of a vivisectionist at work, the man with the knife, with, in his case, no great end to serve, though I had the assurance of Kate and worthier critics than this incisive touch—this pitiless impartiality was, properly understood, superb.

I grew indeed a little weary of his trumpeted superiority, his unique methods and results and all the rest; clinging more stubbornly, in the full blare of it, to my own obsolete ideals of his craft.

But though, personally, I might prefer the literary artist to the literary surgeon, the man himself was another matter, one with which preference had less to do.

You might hold out, you did for a time, intractably, against the charm which, sooner or later, he would delicately impose, yielding at last more to a sense of your own ungraciousness than to any urgency of his. While in a manner detaining you, until you found the inevitable recognition, he put you exquisitely at your ease, seeming to cover your reticences, your reluctances, and incertitudes towards him with a strong, unflattering wing. He never swooped, as you felt he could quite gracefully and effectively have done, to hold you in the grip of a mind that knew no stumbling movements nor halting flights, nor any state of unpreparedness. He understood and didn't mind your hesitations, meeting and smoothing them with a rich patience, which assured you that it could afford to wait. So gradual was the influence, winning on you by imperceptible inches, that till quite the end I never guessed to what extent I had given in. He suppressed himself to give you room, kept in the shadow not to disturb your flickering lights; his own, one suspected, burned extremely clear, defined things perfectly; though he had the air

of moving about like the rest of us with a delightful vagueness, involved in the general mist.

"If he didn't ignore so charmingly," Kate pointed out, "his own importance, you wouldn't be grudgingly giving him the benefit of a doubt which doesn't practically exist. He would get from you his due. And I believe he really does. Admit that, in your treacherous, timorous heart, you are half afraid of him, and to meet the case have fallen back on your religious instincts, and are burning little private candles on his altar in self-defence? I burn them too, but openly and with a difference; not to propitiate my deity, merely to come in for a share of the reflected glory—to shine a little too."

"But isn't superstition," I suggested, "one of your great man's pet nine-pins—the chief one, in fact—that he's so elaborately setting up for the pleasure of so neatly knocking down?"

"Oh! he won't draw the line as close as that," she inconsistently turned round; "he won't count himself a superstition. They don't, you know."

He was not then, I mildly urged, too much above and beyond us all to believe immensely in himself.

"Only with him"—she saved herself—"there is a solid basis of belief. He can't help knowing that he is bound—whatever he's driving at—in the end, to win."

"Are you answering for it, that he will in time get Charlie over to his side?"

"He doesn't for a moment want to. Charlie is too straight a path, he hasn't any windings—not the shadow of a turning, and when Mark Stafford's walking in a garden, he makes instinctively for the maze."

"He finds your young man interesting all the same."

"For just such glimpses, as unwarily, and incidentally, he may afford of me. That's all."

"And you don't mind?"

"Not in the least. I enjoy it, wouldn't you—posing for a master?"

"Do you mean he will have the assurance to put you down in black and white?"

"Nothing so crude! There is the deeper joy of pure discovery—and the passion of the chase. The sport comes in for me, in knowing that he will never perfectly 'get' me. We shall wake up one fine morning to find he 'has softly and suddenly vanished away, for the snark was a Boojum, you see.'"

"Have you made sure of that?"

"It was made sure for me, long ago; when I was born perhaps,

that I must be myself and stay myself and belong, in a fashion, to myself alone. Even marriage——" she suddenly broke off.

"Yes," I prompted, "even marriage——?"

"Well, I can't to anyone open every door; whoever owns the poor little house, there must be rooms of which, to the end, I keep the key."

"And this is the person who used to talk of her 'simple self'!"

"The simplest selves have, haven't they, private corners, quiet nooks?"

"The simplest people don't deliberately pose to their favourite painters, for the purposes of mystification."

"They don't," she smiled, "always get the chance, with the rare experience thrown in, of watching them at work, surprising their little tricks; and his little tricks are sometimes, let me tell you, quite inspired."

It is difficult at this distance, and in the light, or darkness, of all that has come and gone, to be sure if she really thought as much of him as she made out; whether in face of Darch's evasive attitude and my pretence—it was merely that—of antagonism, she wasn't "standing up" to us from sheer perversity. I am inclined to think she was. One is so apt, in looking back, to tint the glass to the shade of subsequent experience and to see things through it, not in the white glare of fact.

In those early days of their engagement, it is nearly clear to me that the only prominent figure in the landscape was Charlie Darch. There may have been a patch of sky above, and a strip of earth beneath his broad, beaming, genial figure, but the intervening space was inconsiderable. There was no mistaking them, for all their show of taking each other very much for granted, for anything but the happiest pair; their eyes, half-humorously, half-seriously bent on their amazing future, their feet in perfect step—marching, poor children, with a gaiety, a confidence, a blind felicity towards their obscure parting of the ways. Then Darch was unexpectedly called upon to superintend some engineering work in Spain.

Kate declared herself ready for a hasty marriage and the wilds, a scheme which he pronounced impracticable. It was, he insisted, a choice between throwing up the business, or going out for a year, he hoped it wouldn't run to more, alone. Finally, supported by our promise to join him later at some fairly civilised point in Andalusia, if he could manage to snatch a few weeks' holiday, he went.

For four or five months, the bulk and frequency of their

correspondence was remarkable. Then it inexplicably flagged and dropped. This turn in their affairs, for me was complicated by Kate's alternate anxiety and reluctance to mature our plans for Spain. Nothing, with her, of course was obvious, only subtly, like a coming change of temperature, in the air. Without allusion to it, one could see, or rather feel her, raising and removing barriers to our departure, weeks before it could feasibly take place.

I can't say how she produced the effect, but simply that she did, for me, produce it, of a person listening and looking for something she hoped not to find, walking on tip-toe, opening and shutting doors. Her fine composure was not outwardly impaired, but running through it like a twisted thread, one divined a flaw in its smooth surface, wondering from what jar in the machinery it came. At length, making a bold attempt at some unravelment, I asked when we should actually start, what we were going to do. She came out quite distinctly with a plan, a prompt—

“Well, if it's manageable and agreeable for you, what would you say to Biarritz next week, and gently on from there?”

“Gently—but definitely where?” I wished to know.

“Oh! somewhere—can't that be settled later?—within easy range of his outlandish quarters. It's to come for him, by way of a surprise. Isn't it enough for us, just now, that he'll be immensely pleased to see us?”

For me, this presumption was not so entirely sufficing. It came to me, at least, as a surprise, her charming vagueness, her confidence that I should, as I seemed to do, incuriously embrace it. We got as far as Paris, even as far as our last evening there, when suddenly she called a halt. I had gone upstairs to pack, leaving her with some friends, whom she had found in the hotel, to settle the question of the Opéra or the Français, when the message was brought up to me that a gentleman had called, and would I, Miss Belton asked, kindly, at my convenience, descend? I was not greatly surprised to recognise Mark Stafford in our visitor. Paris was a place where he would naturally, if unexpectedly, turn up. He had, he explained, only that morning learnt from mutual friends, that we were passing through, *en route* for Spain. He had hastened at the first possible moment to present himself, tentatively to suggest that, as he was also working round to Madrid, we might be able to make use of him. He hoped we should. His plans were elastic, perfectly adaptable, could contract or expand, if we delightfully permitted it, in sympathy with ours. Kate had been standing by the window with her back half turned, a slight white figure, motionless, with

something almost rigid in the erectness of its pose—while he was making me his explanations; but at this, she turned with the slow grace of all her movements; with an air of serene premeditation, like an actor taking up his cue. “I think,” she said, with an odd deliberation meant to reach something beyond my ear, “that it is the nicest proposition imaginable, one of the most alluring, only unfortunately, after all it isn’t to be Spain. At the last moment, we have had to give it up.” She paused, and without looking across at me, more rapidly proceeded: “This is just a little extravagant splash—and we are absurdly going back to—Scotland. Spain, if it’s ever to be Spain, is—well—not yet.”

“Yes,” I backed her up, and I felt that I was forcing it, as she had exquisitely failed to do, “we’ve had to block it out when it seemed fitted in.”

“But for me,” he faced her, while, though I was obviously out of it, he took me in with an inclusive smile, “this is a real blow. It takes the wind out of the little sail I was so gaily spreading. What—I am falling back on dreams!—I might have shown you, for I know some of the untrodden ways—what we might have done!”

“Ah, yes,” she assented, with a little deprecatory wave of the hand, and quoted lightly—

“‘They sailed across the silent main,
And reached the great Groumbrolian plain,
And there they play for ever more
At battlecock and shuttledore——’

and we are slinking tamely back to—golf! It’s very stupid.”

“It’s extremely sad,” he substituted.

“No” she returned with a faint flush, “it’s not altogether sad, because it’s so courageous. Don’t you think it is?”

He glanced swiftly across at her, and the flush died out, leaving her unusually pale.

“It’s too courageous,” he said, his eyes in full possession of her lovely, inexpressive face, “since it leaves me out in the cold.”

“It leaves you precisely where you were,” she threw back, meeting his glance with a sort of smiling stare, “for weren’t we, in the first instance, going quite alone?”

“But I had the hope—” he protested.

“Oh, the hope,” she interposed, “‘Hope is a timid friend.’ You prefer, admit it, something braver—more definite—even to the definiteness of disappointment.”

“Miss Relton means,” he hazarded, addressing himself to me, “that you wouldn’t have had me after all.”

"Oh, I never answer for Kate. Though for myself——" I left it flatteringly open.

"No one is rash enough to answer for 'Kate,'" she challenged him. "Even you—venturous as you are!"

He laughed.

"I am never that. I am, as you know, the most unconscionable plodder. I potter and crawl. I go extremely slow."

"Then—that," she concluded, "must have settled it, if it hadn't been already settled. You needn't be told that my normal state is quiescent, but when I do move, I want to fly."

"That parts the clouds. I shall scan the sky——" he risked, "on the chance that eventually you may catch me up. Meanwhile I am keeping you from Calvé, you mustn't let me do that. Down below, I can feel them champing, your impatient friends; feverishly buttoning gloves and consulting clocks."

"Aren't you coming, too," her tone, never vivid, was at the moment, singularly colourless, but his put on a warmer tint.

"I?—yes—of course. I am coming, too." She went, at this, to fetch her cloak, leaving a hush behind her in the loud, overlit, flamboyant room.

After a short concession to it, he broke it lightly with—

"So while I pursue my lonely way, the poor young man over there has got to wait?"

"Oh, Kate——" I suggested, "is a person to be waited for, not by any means to be whistled for, to be snatched."

"She might so easily be scared, you mean, or spirit herself away? Yes, and one imagines, too, it must be a waiting, in a sense, in ambush; as it were behind one's tree, since fairies don't come out when mortals are abroad. She has, hasn't she, a touch of the sprite, a vague atmosphere of mist, of moonlight, which makes of Darch still more emphatically an embodiment of, well—of the broad glare of day?"

"In spite of which, she will come out for him—she has; it's part, perhaps, of her charming waywardness, that it's for him she has come out."

"Though for me," he returned, "she won't, she hasn't. I shan't, however," he concluded softly, "despondently believe that she never will."

The ensuing silence was for me intensified by the acquiescence, the absorption in it of Kate herself, who had come back and stood reflected in a mirror facing me, but not within his view. She had noiselessly pushed open the half-closed door and paused there, framed in the high opening, erect, elate, with a strange air of victory, sure and silent, her lips just parted in a faint,

unwavering smile. Thinking herself unseen, she stayed a moment watching us remotely; puppets, from her dispassionate regard, we might have been, inaudibly discoursing on a distant stage.

So curiously detached, exclusively, intensely in possession of herself, and aloof from us, she seemed, that I couldn't naturally make a sign of recognition. Stafford, however, as though aware of it, broke the spell by abruptly rising, turning and confronting her, upon which she advanced a step or two, coming down suddenly as it were, by some, to us, inaccessible private stair.

"It's not to be Calvé," she announced immediately. "It's to be Réjane."

"Your final choice?" he asked.

"Our unanimous decision."

"And she was giving *Carmen*," he protested, "you won't go back?"

"It's too late to go back; and more than time to be going on." At which he joined her and they left me to make what I might of the new tangle.

Briefly, I made little of it; and Kate, to whom I looked eventually for enlightenment, was disappointing.

She knocked at my door shortly after midnight, entered, sat down, deliberately drew off her gloves and waited apparently for comments I was not prepared to offer. At length, accepting my not unnatural reluctance to launch in untried waters, with her slow, tranquil stroke, she pushed off herself.

"You are justly vexed?"

"I am reasonably puzzled."

"And of course it won't simplify things to tell you, late enough in the day, that my engagement with Charlie Darch is 'off'?"

I caught as closely as I could her level tone:

"This happened——?"

"It happened, dear friend, six weeks ago."

"All the same, we were, so I supposed, on our way out to him——?"

"It's incredible, indecent," she assented evenly; "but as you say, we were. You have every right to exclaim that I have behaved, continue to behave, unpardonably; though it's on your patience, your indulgence, I have so much counted for—for"—she paused, got up, walked to the window and came back, "for breathing space, for room to twist and turn as easily as I may."

"You can," I assured her, conscious nevertheless that she was stretching them, "count on them still, I hope indefinitely."

"I know; you are perfect, which makes me monstrous; but I can't bring the figures out of the mist for you. That was," she

pursued reflectively, remotely, "my notion, in getting incredibly and indecently, as I said, at Charlie—who is not a thing of shadows—of uncertainties, and who might—but now I see, who couldn't"—she broke off and ended with a note of new decision—"He mustn't be involved."

"Involved, my dearest child," I asked, "in what?"

"In my intolerable vapours, my precious mist."

"Decidedly," I concluded, "we had better, after all, make for definiteness and daylight by way of Biarritz to-morrow."

"No," she shut it out with a prompt, final gesture. "Not if you are going to be immensely considerate and kind. And if I can't to-night, nor perhaps to-morrow, make things clear, well—you will give me time? Later, you'll let me return to it; we'll repack and restart—that's roughly my idea—quite peaceably by ourselves."

II.

It was not long before the figure which she could not or would not, that night, bring out of the mist, emerged unmistakably in the shape of Stafford.

She had suggested I should give her time: I did, taking it there had been some temporary hitch, not easily explainable, which time would adjust without my interference; her attitude during our stay in Scotland lent colour to this view.

"It's not imperative," she said, "since he's so far off—so fortunately out of it, poor boy!—that the lights should be turned on us just yet. I want a few weeks quietly in the shade."

I acquiesced: it worked in well with my idea that she should want it: Darch, whom I illogically acquitted, would be shortly coming back and they would patch it up. But, at once on our return, she declared her readiness to become for a day or two a subject of discussion, insisting quietly that now it must come out.

"Oh! if it's final——?"

I wouldn't press her, but I didn't hide my difficulty and reluctance.

"You think me horribly light—a leaf in the wind!"

"They have sometimes a way of blowing back?" I hazarded.

"No; they blow on." She was too positive, and her conclusion had an unusual touch of bitterness. "After all, if we are as light as that—as inconsequent—as detached—it doesn't greatly matter, our vagrant way!"

"But you are not, my child," I was throwing at the moment

hands out in the darkness, "as light as that—and if I believed it——"

"Wait!" she interposed. "You'll see."

I saw not then, but soon enough, that the door was definitely shut on Darch, and that any movement towards it reopening was blocked by Stafford. He was not aggressively in the way; he was simply there—a substantial, stationary figure which she couldn't or wouldn't pass and made no effort to dislodge. They both seemed to be standing very still, facing each other, waiting, with the space between them not yet bridged—out clear. My first impulse was to step in and strike out blindly for the poor young man behind the door, but I realised that I had missed my moment, amiably blinking, sitting, it proved, ridiculously still. Now, it was not so much Stafford who tripped me up in my attempt to rise, as Kate herself, with whom I was less than ever on solid ground. She was taking me uncomfortably off my feet. Nothing about her was stranger, when at length they made their plunge, than what, for want of a better term, I must call her assurance. She offered no excuses, for the inexcusable, and appeared to cast no shadow of thought upon a change of front, which, however easily effected, is supposed to have its pensive side. She seemed to have no shadows, no pensive side, so suddenly had she ceased to be the Kate I knew or guessed at. I had said of her once that she seemed to hang between two worlds, giving her then, in thought perhaps, a vague companionship with spirits of a lighter air, but at last she had come down and planted herself on a patch of earth. She hadn't etherealised, she had materialised. Stepping determinately from the path of dreams, shaking away the mists, she stood out an intensely actual figure shining with a hard, new brightness.

For my old-fashioned views, I told her, it was too much of a jump, when almost in the same breath with the announcement of her break with Darch, she wished her new engagement given out.

"But I am quite indifferent," she returned, dismissing me with a brilliant smile, "to the gaping crowd—the public stare."

"And to me too;" I couldn't help reminding her. "To my private stare, which up to now, my dear, I have considerably kept down."

"If I am not indifferent to it, I can face it. Am I the first woman who has changed her mind? I know it's reckoned more picturesque to change it to slow music, but if I prefer to do without the modulation, to start at once with a crash on the new chord——?"

"It doesn't occur to you that that may strike Charlie as rather harsh——?"

"Happily he hasn't a 'temperament'! He will survive; when one knows the worst one can. I liked and like him, of course, amazingly, but—well—God, you know, eventually disposes——"

"Oh, if you mean me to look on Mark as a divine provision——!"

"Can't you? But I see you can't. I wonder why? He is going to be a 'personage,' and by the same token I——" she paused.

"You," I reminded her, "will 'shine a little too.' He will give you, of course, as Charles would put it, 'A much better show.'"

"A share, for what it's worth, of his little row of footlights, yes—but you are not reconciled, you are undisguisedly displeased. Am I too practical or too perfidious? And behind it all, you are still looking for our old friend the spectre—you won't find him—you never will!"

"You admit at last then, that it's there——?"

"Produce it, annihilate it, and I'll own everything," she challenged me, and with that I had to be content.

They spent the honeymoon—a matter of some months—in Egypt, and the letters which she wrote from there, one by one, as I put them by—and together, as I took them out to re-read and reconsider—produced the same crude, unnatural effect: the effect, in fine, of glare.

They showed a curious lack of the half-lights and quiet tones and human touches which had been noticeably hers; telling me everything and nothing, they were mercilessly bright; as though for the time, her personality, steeped in and even hypnotised by the immutable relentless sunshine, had caught the tireless, shadeless brilliance and detachment of the East. I was to find, however, on her return, that she hadn't left it there.

Within the year, for Mark, who had just brought out what is said to be his masterpiece, the little row of footlights was for the first time in full flare; but it was Kate who at once stepped up to them, taking, with an ease, a certainty, the centre of the stage. Interested, amused, her husband genially retreated.

"It's not Mark Stafford's book, it's Mark Stafford's wife," he remarked quietly, one evening, looking round his uncomfortably encumbered rooms, "which explains and justifies this distinguished crowd. It's not to something like two years of pious toil, but to the happy accident of the happiest choice, that I owe my little hour of fame. You can see for yourself, if in the first instance it

was for me they ventured forth, it's for Kate they stay, and it's for her they come again. And you never prepared me! Was it fair——?"

"Didn't she," I asked, "ever confront you with the warning that, in a given case, she meant to shine?"

"Not a whisper, not a breath! She sprang it on me. Don't you remember our old notion of her as a shy, reluctant fay, not to be rudely tempted into the vulgarities, the mortalities of daylight?"

"All the same," I risked, with a sense of touching upon certainty, "you *were*, as a matter of fact, prepared for—anything!"

"I am now," he admitted smiling, "for everything, aren't you? And definitely, for the rapid fall of the curtain"—and, as I didn't catch his drift, he added—"for her backing out of it—suddenly refusing to keep it up."

From our comparatively unobstructed corner, I followed the glance he shot across at her, over the buzzing, faintly scented, somewhat congested company—to be, for the first time forcibly, painfully struck by the unexpectedness, the incredibility of it all. Kate planted there, so vividly reminiscent of, so impenetrably unlike herself, the conspicuous centre of a group of men, for the most part strangers or quite new-comers, intimately held, detained by an influence which I somehow divined to be as far from the spirit of the girl I had known and sheltered as high, quiet stars from the lamps of town.

Never had she looked more beautiful; whatever she had lost—and I can't say how it became chillingly plain to me that some vague virtue had gone out of her—she had gained to a supreme degree, what she had never lacked—distinction.

In her severe white and silver draperies, with her wonderfully dressed fair hair, her erect carriage, her slow, gracious movements, she wore the air of an exiled queen. Her familiar inexpressiveness seemed to be more pronounced, more studied; the repose of her attitude, her voice, her infrequent gestures, was profound—and in its intensity almost provocative of the impression she was obviously and, as I unwillingly conceded to myself, consciously producing.

Her beauty apparently commanded an attention absorbed enough to waive the usual claims of speech. She was listening perfectly, talking little, giving her quiescent charm full play. With an extraordinary rapidity, she had surrendered to some nameless need of prominence, and was finally mounted on her pedestal exposing an insentient surface, while inwardly—I couldn't doubt it—she was breathing some secret flame.

I turned to Mark with an answer, pitched as nearly as I could manage it in his own easy key.

"Why shouldn't she keep it up? She has matured; as you say 'come out'; she wasn't naturally, going to be left behind. You are both, and I suppose you are mutually aware of it, a wonderful—a joint success."

I had never prevaricated with a clearer conscience or a more clouded mind. If she were going to keep it up, if this was what she meant by shining, it became for me an important question whether the background wouldn't grow appreciably darker with the increased definiteness of her luminosity. How long—to put it plainly—would it take to turn Mark's indulgent smile into an intelligible frown? Already I was beginning to hear a shade too much and to see too little of "the beautiful Mrs. Stafford."

I saw more of her gowns, though it was not to her I owed the privilege. Her dressmaker, who happened also to be mine, was not, on my occasional visits, to be deterred from thrusting on me an acquaintance, which I should not otherwise have enjoyed, with her extravagant sequence of "creations." Her tastes had been so simple, her expenditure so modest in this direction that, without exaggerating the significance of trifles, I was compelled to add this new departure to the list of her surprises. Later, I sometimes met with the gowns again, but Kate herself was not now, in any sense, to be come upon in *deshabille*, in the intimacy, so to speak, of the morning wrapper. She was rarely to be found alone; with the wave, as it were, of an invisible wand, she had summoned round her a deterrent band, set up an elaborate human barrier, against old privacies and old associations.

She went everywhere and she never seemed to come really back; her few free hours were merely interludes; she was always going on again. She lived, to my view, at the foot or at the head of stairs, getting in and out of carriages, and relaxing, if she relaxed at all, under the eyes and hands of an heroic maid in the intervals between receptions. As time went on, one or two men—mere names to me—were accidentally referred to in my hearing as being distinguished by her friendship, and Mark himself had casually responded to my interest in the one I picked out at random—a young Frenchman—with—"Oh! a rising sprig, a painter, one of Kate's retainers."

The phrase, while its complacency was, in a measure, reassuring, had inconsequently jarred.

Her husband's work—I heard it on all sides—monopolised him, he was too preoccupied apparently to be critical of his wife's distractions, but to what extent his negligence accounted for

their latitude I saw too little of either of them to decide. They had taken a house in Scotland for the shooting, and in the autumn for a week or two I was to join their party there. Meanwhile conclusion halted; looking at the whole blurred business through what remained to me of her mother's eyes, I was watching rather anxiously for daylight, when Charlie Darch broke in upon the scene.

On my return from a round of visits, I found his card among the little pile awaiting me, and later heard from Mark that in my absence he had cropped up and they had seen a fair amount of him.

"You'll meet him," he added, "with the rest, I hope, in September, if he doesn't look you up before. He's just the same old Philistine; an exhilarating chap!"

If this was how he affected Mark, his presence in the big, strange country house subsequently inspired me with frank mistrust.

He was not the same: he was distinctly older and more finished: he had grown the least bit formidable in the process of throwing off the boyish diffidence which, in the old days, had made him more accessible and, perhaps too, more easily dismissible. A day or two sufficed to show me that his interest in Kate had steadfastly survived, but what she made of the discovery was obscure. If she distinguished him at all, it was by a peculiar stillness in his company, as though she were keeping recognition in reserve, while he stopped short of any intimate approach.

The detestably keen eye I kept on both of them disclosed at length that he too was watching her, intently but discreetly and reluctantly. Poor Kate! What were we looking for? It may have been a conscience-stricken fancy that, for all its stealth, she felt our scrutiny and faced it—beat it off with her unclouded gaze, her remote serenity. There was one moment in the dusk, when there seemed to be something like a lurking horror in it.

The nights were sultry, and I hadn't slept. The house was full and, as usual, she was more or less surrounded; the little Frenchman, at close quarters, proved to be no more a matter for uneasiness than the acquisition of a lap-dog, though at the end of a ribbon held by Kate, he was as much a matter for surprise. She seemed to find his relaxed fidelity, the air of weary ardour with which he hovered round her, mildly entertaining. Mark, when he wasn't shooting, drifted, as his way was, to the background; Darch, too, held himself somewhat aloof; he was obviously not concerned with her immediate circle; these people didn't count, he was looking over their heads indifferently, like a tall man in a crowd.

My visit reached its term a day or two before Mark's birth-day, for which some elaborate tableaux had been arranged; and on the plea that since I had brought my camera, I must stay on to photograph the party and be generally useful, I was persuaded to extend it.

Kate was to posture as Ophelia to the Hamlet of the little Frenchman, who had been languid as an invalid and difficult as a spoiled child until the idea, his own, of impersonating the morbid Dane served partially to restore his lost deportment and vitality. Darch backed out, protesting it was much more in his line to do the limelight. Afterwards there was to be a dance.

The night was fine, but heavy, airless, with the heat that comes before a storm, and contemplating an escape from the hot rooms, with the precaution of my years I had gone up to fetch a wrap, was on the point of going down, when I turned back to throw up my closed window. It looked down upon the shrubbery, festooned to-night with paper lanterns. As I glanced out, I was aware of two figures stationed opposite, against the wall of green. Their presence rather than their attitude, for passion has its magnetism even for those who have out-distanced it, suggested my retreat. I was about to make it when the man bent forward, seizing the woman's hands insistently, thwarting what might have been a movement of refusal or withdrawal. It was Darch, and without waiting for her to turn her head, I knew too, that it was Kate. They spoke so low, I couldn't hear what they were saying—I didn't want, or need, I thought, to hear.

Below, I found Mark asking for her and she presently appeared among the dancers. She hadn't changed the gown she had worn for the 'Hamlet' tableau, copied from some picture of Rossetti's.

"It suits her uncommonly well," Mark commented, "but, under our breath, let us confess she beautifully missed the part. Kate has her qualities, but pliancy isn't one of them. You don't get Pure Reason condescending even to look distraught."

"Is she so purely reasonable?"

"Call it balance. She would be worth watching in a panic—but for this sort of thing," he laughed, "if she had had her way, I believe she would have done Ophelia with her hair up! Didn't you hear her, but perhaps you weren't behind the scenes?—I don't know what's your elegant equivalent—damning the straws?"

She had come up behind, and made her own defence:

"Naturally; a woman's more or less at a disadvantage, and a shade disreputable with her hair down. So I was] shocking? But of course I knew it. If there had been tragedy in me I must

have shown it; I was thinking of supper, and the cook who has an inveterate habit of getting drunk on these occasions. You have your shawl." She turned to me. "You are going out? But who's taking you?"

"Only a step or two, and I am not being taken."

She followed me out on to the illuminated lawn.

"I am not sure if I altogether like this painting of the night," she began, looking round upon the mass of hanging coloured lights. "One ought to be able to command the moon, it's more distinguished and satisfactory. But on the whole, wouldn't you call it a success?"

I was not in the mood to talk inanities, or to wait for a fitter moment, or to question the wisdom of direct attack.

"What has become of Charlie?" I asked irrelevantly. "I have hardly seen him all the evening."

"He doesn't dance, but it may be taken for granted he's doing duty somewhere. He was out here just now."

"With you?"

"Yes." Her inflection hinted faint surprise. "With me."

"It hasn't occurred to you"—I made my plunge—"that you see too much of him, that he's not a person quickly to resign himself—to forget—and that even if it's wise, it mayn't be kind?"

There was a long and rather painful pause, in which she stood staring at the lit windows, the moving figures, and beating time with her fingers on the back of a seat to the waltz which had just struck up. At length she relieved it with—

"I understand. It's an unflattering inference, but I am not afraid of corrupting my old friend—or of shaking his fine stability."

"Or of causing him useless pain?"

"You are assuming—what?" she asked dispassionately.

"Nothing; surely my affection for you both is reason enough—excuse enough—if I have over-anxiously misread the situation——"

She interposed:

"If you want facts, it was not I who suggested his coming here; it was Mark. The 'situation,' whatever that implies, is Mark's affair."

I didn't pretend, I couldn't, wholly to believe it.

"He was not a friend of Mark's," I reminded her. "He never frankly liked him. Do you imagine he likes him better—now?"

She was still staring past me at the lit windows. The waltz had stopped, but she went on fingering the memory of it.

"I haven't the least idea; but why not—when it's all over?"

"Is it all over?" I persisted gently.

She turned round and showed me beneath the unreal, festive lights, a white face, intensely familiar, intensely strange—a young face suddenly grown old.

"Is anything ever over?" she broke out, with the first spark of passion I had ever seen struck from her. "Is even death itself the end? We can't see—can't possibly see—though we *are seen*, and not by any means in a glass darkly. If one was sure—but nothing's sure—that there was at the close—deliverance from this awful light, this uplifting darkness, that we are in the grip of—blind—blind stumblers——!"

Catching at the only thread in this bewildering tangle which I thought I could make use of, I said rather unsteadily—

"We can, at least, see far enough to save ourselves, and others too, from walking crookedly. And Charlie——"

She thrust in swiftly, as if to intercept a threatening blow:

"Before God—I am clear of Charlie. If there's truth in anything, there's truth in friendship; it's a refuge and not a danger; his hands are safe."

"My poor child," I said, her vehemence moved, while it alarmed me, "you are owning that, to some extent, you are in them."

With an abrupt return to her old expressionless detachment, she discriminated:

"Mayn't one, for instance, own to being in the hands of God without dismay? But all this is extremely lurid; it's more to the point, since we are talking confidences, that I am not particularly, as you see, myself. I can't—to define the symptoms—always think consecutively, and I don't remember my engagements."

I was successfully diverted. Such an admission, on her lips, with her unblotted record—she had invariably scoffed at ailments—suggested something which might be grave.

"Have you seen anyone?"

"No. You know exactly what they are. We flock to them in our thousands and they wave us off with a great deal of 'dear lady' and rest, or massage, or change of scene, according to our purse!"

"I shall take you to Sir Matthew Fenton."

"A delightful man, and a profound admirer of Mark's. I know; you would arrange to see him privately and elicit the valuable information that Mrs. Stafford was an ideal hostess and her husband a first-rate pathologist—spoiled; with the genial

afterthought that you couldn't get these charming women to embrace St. Paul's doctrine 'moderation, moderation!' A pause for the inspection of his new Mauve—or is it Maris he collects? and he would amiably bow you out. We eat too many sweets—in fine—and take ourselves too seriously. *Voilà tout!*”

“But you will see him?”

“Possibly, or someone else—if I don't pull myself together. But I mean to!”

She touched my arm with a light pressure of dismissal:

“Are you coming in? You know I ought to be dancing.”

My night's outlook was sufficiently confused, and the events of the morrow didn't tend to clear it.

Mark and I breakfasted alone together; Darch had been up with the lark, he said, and had gone out early; and when, an hour or so later, he came upon me in Kate's little sitting-room, where I had taken refuge from the general dishevelment, he brought in a breath of outdoor freshness with a vaguely uneasy manner and a look of sleeplessness.

He was promptly definite, blankly candid: it was Kate he wanted to talk over, and his unembarrassed assumption of his right to do so, temporarily overcame my impulse to dispute it.

He closed the door and sat down and came out at once with the bald question:

“Have you any idea how bad she really is?”

I had learned in the past that my conversational strategies were no match for his direct simplicity.

“It was only last night she let me suspect that there was anything the matter, and from what she said—it wasn't much—I concluded that she was thoroughly run down.”

“Is that your name for it—or hers?” He seemed to be summoning patience for the potterer he had to deal with, and went on indulgently, “but probably she has not been open with you if you haven't decided on any step——”

“Isn't her husband——?” I began rather pointedly.

He cut me short.

“What is the good of these—these absurd pretences? We are old friends, and we are in possession of what, I take it, is common property. Her husband is probably the last person to whom she is likely to confess a weakness, the first, in fact, from whom she would ingeniously hide it. It's no affair of mine, their mutual attitude, except so far as there must be someone to act. You don't suppose it's my choice to move in the miserable business?”

“Don't you think that all round you may be taking an exaggerated view?”

He got up and began pacing up and down the little room with slow, short strides, stopping at length and resolutely facing me.

"I am breaking faith—but it's clear you aren't aware—and you ought to be—that for some time she's been under a delusion, an obsession—I got it out of her. She thinks, poor child! that there's something, some shapeless horror, looking over her shoulder straight, as she hideously persists, into her soul. Not," he went on, with a sort of forced irrelevancy, "that it won't bear looking into—the clearest pool!—but it's the what—the monstrous thing that's doing it, that's shattering her. And it's not recent. She won't say how long—she says reluctantly—'some time'——"

"She told me last night she couldn't think coherently—wasn't remembering her engagements."

"That's the threat, if we can't avert it, of a catastrophe: she is beginning not to have any thought outside it, not to remember anything but that. She has made an inconceivably splendid fight, but it can't go on; it's for us to prevent her great success from becoming a great disaster. You have seen her, she's been literally smiling through it; but what a nightmare!"

He made a movement which revealed to me how competely she had impressed him with the actuality of the unreal, how appallingly clear, how irrationally reasonable, she must have been. He was visibly, almost physically oppressed; he looked haunted, too. I laid a hand upon his arm.

"It's all terrible, incredible, but you mustn't look almost as if you shared it."

"Wait," he said, "until she tells you herself. Perhaps then you'll be shaken, you'll be inclined to share it too. She must see someone, at once—you are the fittest person to insist. I was pledged on my honour not—as she put it—to betray her, but it's too serious!"

"I must speak to Mark."

"Didn't he tell you? He had a wire—some business muddle—he's gone up to town. It's a matter, so I understood, of a day or two."

He made the announcement with a certain grim relief which drew from me:

"You waited——?"

"No," he checked me. "I simply didn't think of him. I took my cue, I suppose, from—from everybody; they are not spoken of, even paragraphed together; they are independent——" he paused for a word and finally braved it out—"notorieties: will that do?"

"Mark, I remember, used to admire you for your indifference to fine shades. It isn't subtle."

"No, thank God!" he broke out, "it isn't subtle! That's not my line; if it were, I shouldn't be pleading for her now. She would be in my hands not in his—and partially in yours. She wouldn't have been brought to this extremity. Have you never asked yourself," he went on more steadily, "what broke our compact? Have you ever mistaken her, since then, for a happy woman? What is it, do you suppose, that has twisted the Kate we knew into—well, the woman who allows that French poodle to patter at her heels? Kate—our Kate, the Mrs. Stafford of shop windows—the 'beautiful Mrs. Stafford!' What is the key to the whole unthinkable change, if it's not some blind instinct of flight, of escape from some intolerable influence or atmosphere? Call it subtlety, if you like! I haven't found, and I'm not particularly keen to find its name."

"My dear boy," I protested, "I can't follow you. You are naturally distressed, upset, and you are taking the most grotesque and unjustifiable view of the whole sad business. I was on the spot and I believe, although, at the time, I couldn't of course approve of it, that she made her choice deliberately. She was dazzled, one doesn't know how a girl's head is turned, by what—you know how the world looks at things—seemed to her a brilliant opportunity. But why go back to it? As to her husband—and oughtn't he surely just now to have our sympathy?—if he is in any sense to blame, it is simply in having left her perhaps too much to herself. And if she, poor child, hasn't used her freedom altogether wisely, it's after all an intelligible weakness. Wasn't she bound, under the circumstances, to make some stir? Mark himself admitted that she was his finest discovery. He was frankly proud of it, that he didn't miss, even in her, his 'little human praise.'"

He gave me a look which suddenly, decisively, divided us—put an impassable space between us.

"I give it up," was his brief conclusion. "You are all beyond me—I haven't, as you say, a head for subtleties. What do you mean to do?"

"Mark must be told—consulted." For the moment I saw no further.

"Damn consultations!" he said quietly. "What is to hinder your taking her up to-day?"

"For one thing, Kate herself. And then there are these tableaux people to be photographed this afternoon. Half of them will be gone to-morrow. Don't you see how inexplicable, with Mark too

away, it must appear even if Kate would agree to a plausible excuse? She wouldn't—she won't in any case be easy. She is not, you know, a person to be forced."

"It's in your hands." He was speaking now from a distance, trying to make his voice carry—to reach me—to move me. "If it were in mine——"

"If it were," I urged, "you wouldn't before it's absolutely unavoidable provoke the inevitable chatter?"

He deliberately turned his back on me, went to the window and stood cheerlessly looking out. There was nothing more to say—nothing to stay for; I got up and moved towards the door. He hastened to open it, remarking as he did so, dully—distantly:

"I am one of the inconvenient people who will be gone to-morrow." Shutting me out with it—turning into the room again before I had shaped my lips to a conventional regret.

At luncheon, I found it difficult—almost impossible—to fit the picture of my startled thought into the frame of his pitiful disclosure. Her whole aspect of tranquil brilliance, her perfect manipulation of the pieces in the social game, had it not been for Darch's corroborative presence, would have made the dreaded thing unthinkable; but later in the afternoon, the shadow of the cloud took shape. The stage had been left up. Most of the tableaux had been taken, when Kate, who had not come in to tea, and was being asked for, appeared and had her scene set up. She mounted the platform and began rather automatically to strike her pose, when a murmur reached her from below. She had forgotten to change her dress. For a moment she stared, stood still, as if she didn't catch the point of the remonstrance—wasn't going to—when a glance from Darch seemed to recall her to herself, and meeting it, she at once stepped down with a timid, absent—

"So I have. I am sorry. Does it matter? Then we are out of it."

"Not hopelessly," said Darch, who was bent, I understood, on keeping her attention on the stretch. "M. Devereux—Hamlet must be done anyway—in solitary distinction."

"Of course," she rose to it at once, "he mustn't be missed, and after all he gains immensely. Please," she called up to him, "stay where you are."

He untractably descended.

"But no," he objected, "without you—it becomes meaningless, and it must not be that Mrs. Stafford alone remains uncommemorated. Impossible!"

"Oh! for that"—she had regained entire possession of herself—

"it easily arranges itself. You shall commemorate my stupidity! Will this do?"

She walked across the room and placed herself against a *portière*—a white figure erect and admirably posed—smiling out from the crimson folds.

It seemed as if in this momentary presentment, for the first time since her marriage she confronted me alone, cut off. She stood, to my sense, in a cleared, hushed space, the centre of a far-reaching muteness, indefinable and uninvaded by the chattering crowd. With the click of the camera, she was once more of it, a moving, shining part—a sunlit presence with all clouds dispersed.

I had no more speech with her that day. I never, now I come to think of it, had speech with her again. Whether, that evening, she really evaded me, or whether my own uneasy, indeterminate movements towards her—too hesitant to be frankly met—let down between us the final curtain, I can never be quite sure.

I awoke next morning with a firmer mind, less faltering purposes. Too late! She had slipped through my irresolute fingers. Her maid brought me a note at noon. "Madame had wished me not to be disturbed."

I took the envelope from the woman's hand, and, loth to open it under her attentive, initiated eye, dismissed her, divining a disposition to loiter—to be questioned. She left me startled by the simple commentary with which she withdrew. "Madame had accompanied Mr. Darch to the station last night and had not yet returned."

I closed the door on her and turned to the letter which was going to explain itself. But it was not explicit.

"I have left Mark," it started with that abrupt announcement. "Charlie is taking me away. I cannot explain or justify our action; but in time the inevitable justifies itself. The world will have ugly thoughts of us; will you be able to find something truer? I am sure only of one sufficient thing, that God will not condemn us—if it were only God!"

And that was all. I sat staring stupidly at the little sheet with its meagre, startling statement, waiting perhaps for some light to flash out from between the lines, upon those two elusive, receding images, of Kate, of Darch, which slowly, strangely enough, as the minutes passed, became obscured, over-shadowed by another; till at length it was Mark alone I distinctly saw. For me, for themselves, they had taken flight, but he remained and I—I who must singly and immediately face him, be arraigned possibly before him and vicariously stripped and judged. It

came over me with a force which left me almost indifferent to the other exigencies of the moment, the dismissal or entertainment of his lingering unenlightened guests, of whom I finally disposed as rapidly and adroitly as I could.

Travelling all night, I arrived in London, unreasonably early, but as soon as I felt myself presentable, I set forth and knocked at the familiar door. He was out. The man knew nothing of his movements beyond a probability of his being home to dinner. I left a note and went home and waited the better part of the intolerable day.

When at last, late, he was shown in, the tense silence which served for greeting served too to show me that it was not now on me that sentence was to be pronounced. If it was on her, I was ready with my testimony—my plea.

"You wished to see me?" he said at length, in the tone of one gravely, patiently wondering why.

"I wanted you, without delay, to know all the facts, because they must prove to you that it's not, even now, too late to recall—to save her."

"Kate," he said, slowly, reflectively, seeming, with this utterance of her name, to summon her, set her visibly, tangibly there between us. "You have not heard? but how should you? She has saved herself."

"By coming back?"

"No, by going on"—he paused—"by dying!" He spoke considerately, deliberately, as if—called upon brutally to strike—he found no means to humanise the blow. "She died last night."

"How?" It broke from me, an articulate dread, not of the event, but of the manner of it.

"Quite simply and suddenly. They had got as far as Dover—and there, with scarcely any warning, she failed—and ended. They give, of course, some plausible name to it, but it was, as you know, her habit—her nature—to do things very quietly, and this—this step of hers was too violent, too unnatural. She felt herself falling—she did fall, and practically—it killed her."

"The effort, you mean, to recover herself, the will to return, was there, but ineffectual?"

"We shall never know. She has eluded us to the end. It's terrible, but it's perfect. It's Kate herself!"

His thought seemed to be folded in the present, voluntarily bounded by the day so near its close, as though he had schooled himself to press no further; but I was looking back from this strange deliverance to the unintelligible past, and on to that

future with its threatening dusk—averted. She *had* been spared.

"As it is," I managed to say, "she is safe—her memory—herself——?"

"Absolutely. It's in her face."

"You have seen her?"

"I could almost believe I had never before seen her." He stopped, and added after an interval, "but that's unspeakable. Death is an appalling silence."

"And an absolution?" I wished to know it.

He didn't answer at once, and when he did, it was with a sort of finality, a weight as of last words:

"They are beyond that—the dead. They are divinely indifferent."

"If you mean we can't reach them, I don't believe it."

"It is better to. There is that poor young man trying hard not to believe it. He won't succeed."

"You have forgiven him?"

"I am bound to feel immensely sorry for him. He will move his heaven and his earth to call her back, and she won't come." He held out his hand; he *was* final. "You were anxious to tell me things, but I shall, please remember it, never want to hear them. They are profoundly immaterial, now, the things that can be told. Good-night."

* * * * *

It was some weeks later that poor Charlie wrote to me, making vivid, in his simple, troubled note, Mark's image of him, vainly moving his two worlds to call her back.

He was the last person, he knew, he wrote, to ask or be granted any sort of favour—but he was asking one—perhaps the most unpardonable. He wanted, of my charity, the photograph of Kate—the last—he supposed I had it—taken that afternoon in Scotland. He had long since destroyed the earlier ones, his own, and had nothing for what—for want of a better word—he would call remembrance. He would take my silence, if it must be, for refusal, and fully understand it. But perhaps I too might understand and—not refuse.

After a momentary hesitation, I replied telling him I had as yet done nothing with it, but if he cared to come and see in about a week's time, I hoped to have it ready for his acceptance. My attitude, which might intelligibly have been less friendly, was partly determined by Mark's sympathetic sketch of him, and partly by a sense of my own shortcoming in having perhaps met imperfectly his earlier and more impersonal appeal. I believe

too, I hoped he might have something to tell me, be able to throw some light upon the edges of the cloud by which, in thought, they were both still, for me, somewhat over-shadowed.

I had meant some time to elapse before I touched the portrait,—that poignant reopening of a too recent wound, for which, with the grim self-torture of youth, he pleaded. For me, its associations were too tragic, and the curious muteness, the sense almost of suspended breath which I remembered to have felt in it, was too premonitory of what had so shortly afterwards come to pass.

That afternoon, however, I took out the plate and proceeded to develop it. It came slowly, and eventually, as I held it up, I slightly recoiled—was suddenly struck with something wrong about it, unexpected, strange! Beside the face I was looking for there appeared, not—and yet after all it was another—or the semblance of another face; twisting round, immediately behind her, close over her shoulder; not at first to me a thing human or recognisable, but gradually growing hideously distinct, monstrously familiar—the face of her husband—of Mark himself!

For a second I stood frozenly staring at it, and then with a violence, involuntary, uncontrollable, I threw up the window and flung it out, down, on to the pavement below, where it fell in shattered fragments.

My first instinct during the days and nights which followed, as the horror defined itself—unbearably persisted—was to share it—to shift the weight of it, in defiance of reason, in defiance of everything; and it was naturally Darch to whom, in those hours of disorder and oppression, I was prepared to turn, for whom, in fact, I was tremulously waiting.

But when, punctually at the end of his week, he came, his burdened presence steadied me and I forbore.

As he stood there before me so altered, so spent, so inarticulate, my own selfish need declined, my intention of relief at his expense receded; and I understood that that intolerable revelation must be finally and for ever consigned to silence—to the limbo of unutterable things.

He talked for a time inanimately, evasively, of the weather, the opera, the changes in the Cabinet, but while I listened to that lifeless voice of his uttering its unprofitable commonplaces, I was aware of another, a living voice, lifted above it in insistent supplication.

“Not of Kate,” it reiterated, “let us speak of anything, of everything but her.”

And she was not named between us, she was simply, mutely, unconquerably present—a haunting shade.

At length he got up to go, standing before he made farewell, silently, submissively expectant.

"You will find it difficult to forgive me," I told him gently, "but after all, you were not to have it—none of us were to have it, the precious thing you are waiting for. I have—I had—I hardly know how to confess it—irretrievably spoiled the plate."

He remained silent, looking at me lingeringly, intently, questioningly in the face, and for an instant, I shrank back before that disturbing scrutiny. Was it possible, imaginable—that he guessed—he knew?

But as soon as I found courage enough to meet, to return his gaze, I saw in it merely the fixity, the pain, the incredulity of acute failure and something like despair.

"It was hopeless, impossible?" he asked at last reluctantly.

"It was quite hopeless, quite impossible," I said.

CHARLOTTE M. MEW.

The Treasure of the King.

THE "Gray House" stood there in the year 1800. It was an old house then, but fashioned of the material that defies time; the square walls were granite, of great thickness and excellent masonry. It had two floors only, the lower was the smoothened surface of the virgin rock, the doors and heavy shutters were of solid oak. Stiff and grey, a land-mark of the wild south coast, it perched on high ground that sloped rough and sheer to the little bay beneath. Seaward, in full view of the house, the "Jailor Reef" and the restless channel struggled eternally. The "Jailor Reef," a ridge of out-lying dangerous rocks, almost entirely submerged at high water, was better known to the few scattered residents as the "Gantlets," perhaps because in days of old some imaginative observer had pictured the rocks as outcast stones running amok with the resistless tide, the din of their fury never ceasing, the uproar of their resistance never entirely still.

In the year 1800 Lieutenant Chadfield of the King's Navy was owner and occupier of the lonely "Gray House."

They were stirring times, and duties in connection with coast defence had brought him to the neighbourhood. He was accompanied by his beautiful young wife; they resided in the house during its summer glory, and under her fostering care its wind-blown garden—sheltered by low stone walls—boasted a few hardy flowers that bloomed and thrived.

She grew to love the solitude; did it not look out upon the sea, the limitless arena of her husband's noble calling? When he was absent from her, she would make her way with dainty footsteps down the steep and winding path to the little beach, she would dabble her white hand in the water, it would be wet with the same ocean that bore his ship on its surface, she would caress the sparkling brine, it would be a link of love with her absent lord. So Lieutenant Chadfield yielded to her desire and became the owner of the "Gray House."

It was a night of early October, the oaken shutters with the heavy clasps were closed; the oaken door with its many bolts was secured, the wind might howl and rush with all its force upon the "Gray House," the inmates were indifferent to its assaults, for cheerful fires burnt upon the hearths, the floors of solid rock were covered with thick matting and warm rugs.

Whilst peace and comfort reigned within the granite walls, into the village four miles distant a horseman rode at a gallop; he tarried at the inn just long enough to tighten the girths and ask direction to the house of Lieutenant Chadfield; then he rode on and slackened not his pace until he reached the "Gray House," when he dismounted and hammered on the oaken door.

This rider was most heartily welcomed, for he was a messenger from the King, the bearer of a despatch containing Lieutenant Chadfield's promotion to the command of the *Audacious* frigate of forty guns, with summary instructions to join his ship at Gravesend for important service.

"It may happen, Catherine," said Captain Chadfield, as he held his young wife to him at the moment of parting, and kissed the sleeping face of the baby boy she held in her arms, "it may happen, Catherine, that I sail to the westward. If that be so, and wind and daylight favour me, I may steer in shore to catch a last glimpse of our home, and perchance of thee, sweetheart; so keep a bright look out for the frigate, darling, you and old Dicky Boon."

"Heaven give you a prosperous voyage, in this your first command, dearest, and a safe return to us! God grant that we shall be here awaiting you, baby and I."

Within a week the *Audacious* had left the Thames, and it was known to the Government and those in high places that the smart ship and her able commander were entrusted with the grave responsibility of carrying treasure; a great consignment of minted gold to the Admiral in the Mediterranean.

The *Audacious* touched at the port of Plymouth for final instructions. She stayed but an hour, and many admiring eyes saw her speed away from the Sound under the white pressure of straining canvas, and from that hour she became a mystery of the ocean, an argosy which vanished into the infinite with the treasure of the King; to the aching heart of the widow and fatherless a bitter memory only; a well-spring of tears shed by fair maidens for brave lads that never returned.

It was on the fourteenth of October that the *Audacious*, with a fair breeze, left the Eddystone astern; the same strong air which carried her along swept also over the high land, the "Gray House"

and its occupiers, whose tireless eyes kept watch and watch over the channel.

They each took their turn, the mistress, the girls from the kitchen, and old Dicky Boon—an ancient mariner who tended the pony, grubbed in the wind-swept garden, and was the protector of the household until the master came back.

The day was dying, and with it the fair breeze, the tide still thundered ruthlessly over and around the "Gantlets"; silently and ghost-like from the darkening east rolled clouds of cumulus vapour, the channel was blotted out in mist, then its wreaths enfolded the wild foreshore, and creeping up, wrapped the house in its dim mantle; a supreme sad stillness enveloped the land, the watchers retreated to the open door—they could scarce see each other through the clinging fog.

A man came out of the gloom and joined them. He was Peter Penberthy, the crab-fisher, the owner of the only boat in the little bay.

"I'll be asking leave to sit in the kitchen, mistress, and smoke a pipe with Dicky while this smother be on the hill. It's no' safe to find the path to the cove in this mirk. The tide be running main strong, mistress—do 'ee hear it a draaing of the stoanes—I doan't remember man or boy hearing thicky watter run more spiteful, and this fog be worse than snaw."

The "Jailor Reef" was booming with a dull thunder; it was the only sound which broke the stillness. They were all listening to it as if it was something new to their ears.

"We had better go inside," said Mistress Chadfields. "The atmosphere is chill and damp, the night has fallen early."

"Hark 'ee, Peter Penberthy!" said old Dicky Boon, "it do sound like the roll of a drum."

"It *do* sound like a drum, Dicky; I could fancy there were sodgers on the 'Jailor'."

"I could fancy I could hear men shouting, and the flap, flap, of a great sheet," said one of the girls.

"Listen! Listen!" said Dicky Boon. "Ain't that the rattle o' blocks and the creaking o' straining spars?"

A chorus of sea fowl screamed a weird night alarm.

"Birds!" said Peter. "Birds off the 'Jailor,' and here do come the breeze again."

Raindrops dashed in their faces; a cold sigh came from the east, the baby boy, cradled in the comfortable room, woke from his sleep with a loud wail.

"Come inside," said the mistress. "We are all becoming fanciful; it will be a wild night. God help poor souls at sea!"

"Aye, aye! the good Lord help them all," said old Dicky Boon.

The storm which beat around the house lulled all to slumber save she whose mind was tossing on the ocean with the *Audacious* and her commander. The young wife's head was pressed upon the pillow, and warm in her arms nestled her gently breathing babe; but to the mother drowsy sleep was denied by the din of the "Jailor Reef." That which custom hitherto had trained into a lullaby, now strangely trumpeted an overwhelming defiance to repose; for hours she lay imagining alien discords in its familiar roar. Was that an unfastened shutter that clanged, or a shower of impatient blows upon the outer door? She sprang from her bed, unloosed the clinging fingers of the purring babe, and placed it snugly under the warm bed coverings. Yes, clear and distinct a clamorous knock at the door. She lit a candle and drew on a protecting robe. Margaret and Ann, the maids, and old Dicky Boon would all, of a certainty, be awake by that resounding summons. She opened her chamber door and peered out on to the landing, but no startled sleepers answered her timid call.

Again the door rattled under the urgent knocks. The servants were indeed difficult to arouse; she must answer that call and act alone; it might only be a belated countryman seeking shelter. Down the staircase she sped, her fair hand turned the key, and drew back the strong bolts; the door flew open by pressure of the wind, and as a rush of damp cold air extinguished her candle with its blast, something, carrying with it the dank reek of the brine weed, shuffled past her with sodden weary footsteps.

The night was one overhanging black obscurity.

"Who is it? Where are you? What want you? Why do you not answer?"

In the strength of a sudden fear which took possession of her, she pushed to the door, shot the bolts, and leaned against the wall, her frightened eyes trying in vain to pierce the darkness.

A welcome gleam of light came from the staircase—there were Dicky Boon and Margaret and Ann, candles in hand peering down.

"What is it mistress? We heard the door open and shut."

"Did you not hear knocking?"

"No, we heard no knocks."

"Come down! come down! Some one knocked loudly, the wind blew out my light; something passed me in the passage. Bring your candles!—see! see!"

The stone passage bore the marks of wet and dripping feet, even clots of creamy sea-foam were upon the stairs; from the warm bed above the babe gave a sudden scream; they hurried to it. The mother knew that it had been lifted from its nest to without

the quilt; there were glistening flakes of the beach-foam upon its night-clothes—it shuddered, and thrust with its tiny hands, as if repelling a cold embrace.

With the dawn came sunshine, clear sky, soft, gentle air, blue dancing sea, but the “Jailor Reef” still spouted and moaned. The Mistress of the “Gray House” descended the winding path to the beach, Dicky Boon hobbled in front. When he reached the tide-mark, he knelt down by an object that lay inert among the weed, then he rose up and waved his arms and cried:

“Mistress, turn your head—go back, go back! come no farther, mistress; for God’s sake, go back to the child and the house.”

“Why should I return? What have you there? Nothing daunts me in the daylight, and you, my friend, are with me—I will not go back.”

They both stood by a fearsome thing; it had once been a man before the forces of boundless ocean and the jagged reef had ground and battered it into mangled jetsam in which was no recognition or likeness. Some shreds of clothing suggested the uniform of an officer, hair thick, black and long, a forehead smooth and white stamped it with the hall-mark of youth. Unclaimed, unknown, the pitiful sea-drift was carried to the reposeful churchyard to await the identification of the day when the sea shall account for its victims; and Catherine Chadfield lingered in the “Gray House” until her locks were silvered.

The years had rolled on until it was an old story, how in the days of the war, the *Audacious* frigate outward-bound with great treasure of gold pieces consigned to the Admiral in the Mediterranean, was utterly lost, not even a derelict spar recovered to account for, or locate the mystery. And yet, with ever-hopeful anxious gaze the Lady of the “Gray House” still looked across the sea.

The country neighbours, when they spoke of her, tapped their foreheads significantly. Was it not well known that no maid-servant could be found to stop in the house with a mistress who continually rose at night to answer to knocks at the door which none else could hear; and, stranger still, the floors and passages were often adrip with the water of the sea, and damp, uncanny foot-prints would be found upon the stair; no wonder the maids refused to stay. Thus only Dicky Boon, the aged seaman in his dotage, remained as faithful servitor. Most of his days were spent in crooning by an often empty hearth, for the shadow of poverty had fallen upon the “Gray House.”

One article after another of the solid furniture had gone to the distant town to be exchanged for the money that necessity

demanded. There had been the boy's schooling to provide for, his maintenance at the college, his fees as a student of medicine and surgery.

The month of October was at hand, and with it came his twenty-first birthday; his fond mother had kept him in ignorance of her desperate straits. He was coming home; she could no longer conceal from him the destitution that was within the walls. There was the house, remaining; it was hers to dispose of, if it were possible to find a purchaser for that storm-steeped solitude. She had clung to it in a wild hope that remained eternal as the booming riot of the "Jailor Reef," a crazed expectancy that, in answer to the midnight knock, she would at last open the door to find her handsome husband, the captain of the *Audacious*, holding out his arms as in days which were but memories.

* * * * *

The boy was coming home. It was the fourteenth of October, the afternoon was dying, the east grew black, and a fog-bank rolled up solemnly from the horizon and obscured the channel and the cliffs, then hung around the "Gray House" like a pall, while the noise of the hidden reef grew more resonant.

The cart which was bringing him from the village, crept slowly along the lonely road, the driver leading his horse, and keeping the track with difficulty in the impenetrable mist.

"We be close there now, young master; here be the guide stoon which old Dicky do whitewash."

"Hold a minute, friend. It is three years since I heard the roar of the 'Gantlets,' yet there is something mingling with it now which is not familiar. I could swear I hear the roll of a drum—voices in shouts of command, the creak of cordage, and the flapping of canvas all aback, yet the channel must be smooth, for the air is stagnant and still."

"What might be the day of the month, master?"

"It is the fourteenth day of October, and my birthday."

The horse in the shafts raised its head, pricked forward its ears and snuffed the thick atmosphere, wheeled round and plunged as if it would gallop away homewards. The driver fought with the terrified beast; he was trembling too, for, since boyhood, he had heard of the fog-night, the beating of the drum, and the cries of lost souls on the "Jailor Reef."

"Master!" he shouted, "the young horse be main affrighted of the cliffs and the say; it be only a few steps to the 'Gray House'; I can't hold him no longer. Will ye please lift out your trunk and carry it up the path? Steady, horse, steady! Thank ye kindly, young master."

Then the peasant sprang into the cart, seized the reins with both hands, and giving the animal its head, rolled madly away inland from the discordant uproar of the fretted rocks.

* * *

It was near midnight; the boy, with a dull aching sorrow at his heart, had realised the appalling poverty of his home, and what loving sacrifices had been made on his behalf. It was a crushing blow to his youth and pride; he wished to be alone, to think and ponder, if possible, a way out of the unwelcome coil. With many affectionate words and tender persuasions he had induced his mother to retire to her chamber, and the garrulous and admiring old servitor to totter up the stairs to his sleeping-place. There was a blazing fire of drift-wood on the hearth, a lamp which burned oil brightly, on the table. A strong wind had arisen with heavy rain, and the storm soughed and moaned around the house. The boy sat motionless, and scarce had settled his mind to thought, when a resounding shower of knocks at the outer door startled him into activity. He sprang to his feet, and without pausing a moment, hurried along the passage to draw the bolts and turn the key. The heavy door flew open by pressure of the rushing elements, a form surged past him in the darkness. It carried with it an atmosphere of chilly damp, an odour of long saturation in the acrid liquid of the sea-bed—footsteps squelched wet and wearily along the passage.

The boy, without closing the door, followed this visitor of the night into the illumined room. The light of the lamp shone upon the figure of an officer, in the naval uniform of Nelson's gallant day. Long, wet, thick black hair clung about a smooth white face, that wore a troubled and anxious expression; the eyes were dark and piercing, though the lids were red and inflamed with the buffeting of salt waves; the sea-spume dripped from his clothing, his bare hands were numb and blue. He moved them up and down with feeble gesture, as if they would convey the speech his pallid lips were powerless to utter. He pointed outwards to where the "Jailor Reef" contended with the storm; there was meaning in the look, and significance in the gesture.

"You are shipwrecked, good sir! Draw near the fire, drink from this glass, it is strong ale!"

And, as he handed the beverage which his mother had placed for his own entertainment, the boy darted a quick incredulous glance at the stranger, at the numbed waxen-looking-outstretched hand, then at the glass, which fell through it, and was shattered into fragments on the floor.

"A thousand pardons!" he exclaimed. "A thousand pardons,

sir, for my clumsiness. Draw nearer the fire ; excuse me but a moment while I rouse the house. We shall find you refreshment and dry clothing—but a moment wait.”

Yet, as he ran to the staircase, twice he looked back over his shoulder with a dread perplexity.

“Mother ! Mother ! Dicky ! Dicky ! Rouse you, rouse you, at once ! Here is a shipwrecked gentleman in urgent need ; come quickly ! ”

She was already on the stair, a candlestick in her hand.

“The knock, Ronald, the knock ! Has anything—has any one entered ? ”

“Yes, mother, yes. It is well you have not retired. There must have been a wreck. Here is an officer well-nigh spent. Have you but a drop of brandy in the house ? Come quickly, come ! ”

She had grasped his arm, her fingers trembling, her whole being agitated with the delusive hopes which haunted her ; he hurried her excitedly towards the guest, in all eagerness of hospitable concern, only to stand transfixed upon the threshold—the lamp-lit room was vacant.

“But see, mother, see here where he stood, here, on the hearth—see, the water which dripped from his clothes now steams on the hot stone, and here is the broken glass that his numbed fingers could not hold—and here are his wet footsteps in the passage, and these clots of sea-foam. The poor soul is demented by his sufferings, I will follow and bring him back.”

“Stay, Ronald, stay ! ”

But he had run out into the black night, shouting :

“Ahoy, there ! Ahoy, there ! friend, we would help you ! Why have you so quickly gone ? Ahoy, there ! Ahoy, there ! ”

Only the roar of the “Jailor Reef” answered him, the howl of the wind which lashed and stung his face with its driving rain ; he was fain to return to the house unsatisfied.

His mother still stood where he had left her, her eyes fixed in rigid stare at the sea-water on the floor, and the broken glass.

“Ronald ! Ronald ! shut to the door. You saw no mariner ; you were but dreaming. Shut to the door.”

“But, mother, what if he returns ? ”

“He will not return. Shut to the door.”

“Mother, I swear I was not dreaming. I spoke to him—why, see, here are his traces, the very prints of his feet. What will he think of our indifference if we shut him out ? He may have gone to the help of his shipmates. I must go also. I will call Dicky to stay with you.”

“Boy, shut to the door. I tell you he will not return. I am

terrified. The draught which rushes in is scattering the fire. Shut to the door."

He did her bidding, but first opened the shutters from without, that the light might shine through the window as a beacon.

"What was the man like that you imagined you saw? Was it—was it your father, Ronald? Was it your father?"

"My father! Mother dear, what sad fancies possess you?"

His arms were round her as he looked into her troubled face.

"My father, and his ship's company, God rest their souls! vanished with the *Audacious* and the treasure of the King. I never knew my brave ill-starred father."

"Yet you know well his miniature. It is he to the life—he had fair sunny hair like yours, which curled and waved, blue, truthful eyes, and the handsomest, kindest face that ever woman looked upon."

"It was not my father, my father is long dead."

"Had this man hair black and long, and was his forehead white and smooth?"

"Yes, just as you say; hair thick and sodden with the sea, which clung to his white forehead like strands of jet."

"Then his body, Ronald, was a fearsome sight, torn and mangled by the rocks, his features lacerated to a hideous mask—his clothing in shreds. Were you not frightened—were you not shocked?"

"No, mother, it is you who dream, and harbour morbid fancies, born of this lonely place and its mournful associations. The gentleman I saw was of good presence, though in sorry plight."

"Did he speak, Ronald, did he not speak?"

"I am sure he wished to impart some pressing intelligence, that scantiness of breath and the very extremity of exhaustion strangled upon his lips. He was half-drowned, yet he must have climbed the steep from the beach; it passes comprehension that he should thus slip away. If you will not let me go seek him, then let us sit here together, keep a great fire, heat water and prepare food. He or some others will surely come to the light for succour and shelter."

"No one will return, Ronald; the knocks come but once in the night. I should know, for how often, yes, how often have I answered them!"

"You, mother! You have opened the door to such a summons before?"

"Ronald, it is twenty years to-day since the *Audacious*, with your father in command, sailed out from Plymouth Sound. I had been hoping for many days to sight his vessel if it bore near

enough to enable him to take a parting view of the house and perchance of us at the door. You were then a tiny babe in my arms; it was the fourteenth of October, and you were twelve months old. We were disappointed, you, and father and I, for on the afternoon when he must have passed, a strange unusual fog came down and hid the sea and the land. That night we fancied unaccustomed sounds mingled with the noise of the beating sea upon the reef, and that night for the first time there came a knocking at the door. I myself opened it, and was conscious that something passed me in the darkness. I heard wet bedraggled footsteps, and traced them to the bedside in which I had left you sleeping, there was glistening sea-spume upon your little night-dress. The next morning we found a body on the beach, a dreadful sight, the rocks had torn and mangled it into shapeless ruin. Oh! it was too appalling. Ronald, my constant dread has been that it, that ghastly cast-up, clamoured for entrance. Yet I have opened the door with what terror in my heart words cannot express. I have said: 'Who is there? Who comes? What want you?' praying to hear a dear remembered voice, yet in fear of that torn dead thing. My eyes have been closed, I have been afraid to look. There has been no answering voice, nothing but the sense of a chill inexplicable presence, and when, having closed the door and found will to look about me, these wet stains of passing feet give confirmation to my fears. Is it wonder the neighbours think me mad? Perhaps I am, or I would not have courage to live."

"Nerves, dear mother, nerves! The worry of this mystery, the depression of this solitude, your troubles, and the moaning of the reef. You shall not be alone again. Whatever fortune has in store for us, we will share it together. I will not leave you to these fears."

So they sat, undisturbed, through the night, mother and son, and kept the fire of drift-wood brightly burning until the rosey dawn looked in at the window. The gale was silenced, and they wondered at the calm beauty of the morning.

* * * * *

It was late afternoon, and Ronald descended to the beach. The tide was at its lowest, and there was not a ripple on the water; the barrier reef stood high and black and marvellously quiet.

The old crab-fisher came shorewards in his boat. Ronald went to greet him and inspect the catch.

"Will you lend me your boat, Peter Penberthy? I have a fancy to go out to the reef. I never before saw the sea so

quiet and the 'Gantlets' so high out of the water. I should like to climb and stand on the top of the 'Jailor.'"

"The rocks was main noisy last night, Master Chadfield; I be getting deaf, but I heard 'em. It was the fog night when the drums do roll, and the say do shout like men—only once a-year, thank God! It be twenty year since your mother and Dicky Boon found a drowned man just here in the weed. Be main careful of the old boat, master; it be slack watter now, but when it do flow, it do run like a river. Don't stop more'n a few minutes, and don'tee go for to climb the 'Jailor,' it be only a stoan fit for gulls to perch on. Haul she up high and dry when ye do come back, I be going to village wi' fesh."

Ronald took the oars and pulled leisurely for the reef. He landed under the "Jailor," a forbidding weed-covered crag, which reared its great head monarch of the "Gantlets." He made fast his boat under its shadow. He would not stop long, only long enough to walk the "Jailor Reef" from end to end. To spring and clamber over the rough rocks and slippery weed was not easy, but he accomplished his purpose, and stood, a lone figure, on the extreme point. There were ships visible in the channel course, mere white specks on the horizon; as he watched them they became blurred and indistinct, then altogether invisible through a hazy mist which rolled rapidly from the east, and was round and about him, over the reef and the land, blotting all out with its vapoury folds in instant bewildering obscurity.

The boat! The boat! As he turned anxiously towards it, the full force of the danger flashed upon him. The leaps from rock to rock, which in the light of day had been difficult, were more than perilous in the blinding mirk; his very direction was uncertain—his progress slow. The tide! In gathering volume it swished past, the growl had commenced which would end in the roar of the "Jailor Reef." The ledges he had crossed dry shod, were covered inches deep in creamy surge—he splashed and stumbled through in reckless haste. Was that the base of the "Jailor," the long hanging weed that swung and dipped in the flow which was seething about his knees? The painter of his boat should be thereabouts, coiled around a boulder. He plunged his arms into the water, the taughtened hemp was there, but no lively craft answered to his tug, a sunken inert weight defied his strength.

"I lifted it!" jeered the incoming ocean. "I lifted it on my mighty swell, then let it fall on the jagged mussel spikes. Your old tinder-wood shell will never float on me again. Pull your

hardest, puny man! You may tear out the rotten 'fore-foot,' it's only a fathom deep."

Another throb of the briny pulse, and a green roller, with icy touch, swelled upward to his waist. Shrinking from its chill contact, he sent an involuntary cry for help through the clouded atmosphere and across the watery divide; vain attempt! If he was to live he must climb out of reach of the resistless current. The "Jailor's" head, he knew, was ever above sea-level, its crown then was safety. With vigorous grip and active foothold, he faced the precipitous ascent, and as he mounted higher and higher, so did the mist become thinner. He reached the top, a flock of sea-fowl whirled away with startled screech. He was in bright clear air, for above him the sunlight still lingered; below him, even at his feet, was a boundless field of white dense vapour, rolling in cloudy volumes before an air from the east, denser masses, too, came swooping down on an ever-increasing draught.

It seemed ages that he paced the narrow confines of his rocky prison. The day was dying, his saturated clothing chilled his bones. In an hour it would be dark, the flow would soon be at its height; the waves had gathered impetuous strength, he trembled at their menace, and the prospect of a night on the roaring Reef.

"Ahoy, there! Ahoy, there! 'Bout your ship!" he cried. "Turn to the southward! turn, turn quickly! You will be on the reef. Turn! Turn!"

Above the fog-bank emerged the topsails of a square-rigged vessel, they were bellied out with great force of wind pressure, and headed direct for the "Jailor" with vast swiftness and confidence of steering; the bowsprit, leading the way, rushed javelin-wise upon the rock, to be shattered and splintered into match-wood. The whole oaken mass charged after it, but no resounding crash accompanied the impact—the masts rocked in their sockets, but there was no noisy slatting of canvas or deafening rattle of loose gear and thrashing blocks. The great hull "listed" and slid backward until the stern was so sunken that the waves jumped a-board and began to sport with their prey, the fog-bank rolled entirely away as if it had done its deadly work and was hastening to join the shadows on the land.

To Ronald the whole details of the tragedy were plainly visible, they were happening beneath his rock.

There was, momentarily, great confusion, as the watch below came swarming on deck. The commander stood proudly erect

upon his quarter-deck, but no resonant voice resounded from the speaking-trumpet he held to his lips. Officers received his orders in dumb show, seamen dashed hither and thither, cutting and hauling at this or that, a drummer beat with his little sticks upon a drum which had no sound, and in answer to the silent call files of marines mustered in order upon the sloping deck and stood grim and steady, their officers facing them as jaunty as if on parade, though still the broken hull slid surely backwards. Some business of great import received the hasty attention of officers and seamen—hatches were thrown violently off, active men dived below, and many weighty chests were handed up; they took the united strength of several seamen to lift, and with frantic haste and great exertion, were slung over the bow and perched on the small and insecure surface of the sloping rock, a lieutenant with a score or so of men had landed with them, and held them in their place. The hull gave a great slide, her stern-weight was over the ledge, the bow reared like a horse, and the ruined fabric plunged mightily down in a whirlpool of foam. Men, hurtling like stones from her deck, were shot into the swiftly-running current, to be sucked down in the gurgling vortex, or swept helplessly away in the rush of the tide.

A great volume of water rebounded from the grave of the sunken ship, it ran greedily up the rock and licked off and carried away in its back-wash two-thirds of the seamen who clung to the treacherous rocks—those that remained, the officer and six men, had saved themselves by grasping the heavy chests which held like moorings by reason of their extreme weight.

There was but one sound came out of that whirlpool of sudden disaster. It was the voice of the commander in a final mandate—it thrilled the listener on the "Jailor" with awe unspeakable, there were tones in it beyond the power of nature, and it cried:

"Lieutenant Hensler, you guard the treasure of the King."

The officer had a sword at his side, he drew it and saluted gravely, then returned it to its sheath, and immediately both he and his men proceeded to drag the chests higher and higher up the wave-swept rock.

Ronald, filled with concern for the hapless toilers menaced on all sides by watery death, clambered down to their aid, shouting:

"There is safety on the summit, though very small, it is over above the tide; up here, my friends, let me too pull at your rope—quickly! quickly! it must be done."

Further speech was frozen upon his lips, for he was confounded to find that his presence was not noticed, that the clothing of the

castaways was of a fashion gone by in the King's navy; that their hair was long and unkempt, their eyes were lustreless, their faces expressionless masks—that they worked like automatons with a weary strength which was supernatural, and that their white-browed officer was the midnight visitor who had hammered at the door of the "Gray House."

Terror-stricken, in the gathering darkness and wild surroundings, the young man looked on at what he fearfully realised was a fantastic vision, a long-since tragedy of the deceitful sea, the actors, shades, things ghostly, of no substance—the treasure-chests they laboured with mere imaginations—the conjurings of a brain wrought upon by the evil solitude and riot of the reef.

The force of circumstance reminded him that if he himself would not early join the company of shadowy dead, his personal safety demanded immediate attention. The crown of the "Jailor" was becoming untenable, even for a web-footed creature of the sea—the waves swept it like a continuous cataract, their spray choked his straining breath.

There was a hollow on the brow of the "Jailor," almost a cave, which looked landwards, the only firm foot-hold on its rounded surface; long coarse bottle-weed swung like a curtain before this indent. Ronald, face downwards, dragged himself flat upon the rock to gain its partial protection, but the guardian of the King's treasure had already discovered it; the chests were being raised and thrust into its shelter. Ere the last, with infinite perseverance, had been lifted and hoisted into security, the number of the spectral workers had been reduced to one, the leader only crouched upon the ledge; his party, one after another, had been clutched by the entombing sea to their graves in its solemn depths.

The craving for life in Ronald's young blood overcame any fear of the silent phantom which stood sentry-like on the ledge. He dragged himself to its side, gripped a tuft of weed in each hand and held fast, to fight in the darkness with drowning death amid the war of the rocks and waters, for the long fierce time of the topmost tide.

Little by little that potential power yielded to the influence of an equally mighty force; the law of the ebb must be obeyed, and the flying surge fell lower and lower, the lashing spray of each retiring wave less smiting and weaker in its attack. Ronald could stand erect, breathe freely, stretch his soaked and stiffened limbs.

He was alone—he had not noted at what moment of the tempestuous night his companion's portion of the ledge had become vacant.

The dawn was breaking, and with its advent the wind sighed away to a whisper, and then into absolute stillness, the unfretted sea subsided peacefully, and before the first beam of the morning sun flashed a warm ray of hope into his heart, it was slack water again and a rippling calm.

Ronald pulled aside the curtain of hanging weed and gazed long and wonderingly into the hollow. The chests then, wondrous to say, were things of substance! but had good oak and iron become rotten and weed-grown in a single night? There were the semblance of metal corners still, and the locks, but he could pick them off with his fingers—mere flakes of rust. He swept the lid of the nearest away, and grasped a handful of green-coated coins, he rubbed one hastily upon his sleeve, it was a guinea piece of good yellow gold. He tried another case with the same result—there were twenty in all. His groping hand touched something else, he drew it forth—it was the poor remains of a brave sword and sheath; that portion of it best preserved was a silver name-plate. He rubbed that too, and faint, but legible, could decipher, the inscription: "Herbert Hensler, Lieutenant, R.N."

Alas! unquiet spirit doomed to guard the treasure of the King, what unhappy fate was yours? He mused as he returned the sacred relic to where it had so long reposed.

The touch of the King's gold, his knowledge of the history of the long-lost frigate, his father's untimely end, his mother's life-long grief, her patient endurance, the mysterious visitant, the drum roll of the "Gantlets," the fog-night, the sudden ghostly wreck, the vision of which he could only imagine he had witnessed, all surged through his excited brain. His heart beat tumultuously, his pulses throbbed a warming glow to his finger tips; he was the possessor of glorious news, the sole recipient of a stupendous secret, the future smiled as bright as the morn.

With resolute haste Ronald threw off his sodden coat, his vest, his boots, and stuffed them within the hollow, letting the weed again hang carelessly to hide the treasure of the King. The "Jailor" would keep his secret still, for only sea-fowl and dead men lighted on the reef.

The distant beach was within the compass of a confident swimmer; he must not linger another moment, so swung himself down, made strong his heart, and, plunging boldly in, with sweeping side stroke made good headway, every thrust of his limbs exhilarated him, and brought him nearer the "Gray House" on the lofty land where the relation of his splendid news would be sweeter to him than the food and warm drink his famished nature clamoured for.

From the open door the watchful and half-frenzied mother saw him climbing the steep winding path and ran to meet him.

"All's well, mother, all's well!" he shouted, and when she hung about him in a flood of joyous tears, he caressed her fondly, but loosened her arms from his neck.

"Great news, mother, great news! But let us hasten within. I want dry clothes, for I have spent the night upon the 'Jailor Reef.' Dicky, old friend, set the kettle boiling, and put the whole larder upon the table. Mother, dearest, banish from your mind every care and sorrow, you have heard the last midnight clatter on the door—the spirit guardian of the treasure of the King is free. My father set the task, but I, his son, am now the keeper. Mother, I saw them all, the noble ship, my father too—I heard his voice—the gallant crew brave to the last, I saw them die. We leave for London to-day, you and I, mother; by hook or crook, we must catch the mail coach. We have great business with the Lords of the Admiralty; the widow of Captain Chadfield shall be well considered. I am master of the situation, and I shall make terms, I promise you."

Thus he rattled on as he fell lustily to his breakfast, and revelled in the comfort of warm clothing.

"Dicky Boon! take good care of the 'Gray House' until we return. It shall be warmed this coming winter with peaceful minds and a full purse. There is much comfort yet before you, Dicky!"

Some two weeks later, H.M. Brig *Dexterous* was seen on a fine morning manœuvring off the "Gantlets," boats were lowered, and a party of naval officers landed upon the reef.

Ronald led the way, the boats' crew carried ship-buckets, thus the treasure of the King was returned to his coffers after many years, and the widow of Captain Chadfield was well considered.

J. W. QUICK.

The Dust of Creeds Outworn.

THE July afternoon was warm, and the roar of town came through the open windows of the studio where Jemmy Otway sat and talked with his friends and fellow-artists.

"Listen to it!" said he. "Hear the beast growling; London is one huge vampire,"

"Vampires don't growl," remarked a bullet-headed individual who contrived to get dewiness and wind into his landscapes. "Show us what you have got there; turn it round."

"I am coming to it. Do you fellows know the Cave of Mammon?"

"Certainly not!" rose in chorus from the seven or eight men present. "What poor devil of an artist ever gets his nose in there? We stand outside the door and hold out our hats for coppers."

"Well," resumed Otway, "you remember that near Mammon's cave is the Garden of Proserpina, reached

"Through grisly shadows by a beaten path?"

"I know," said another man, "I recollect the passage. The plants are all black-leaved and narcotic, and Persephone sits on a silver throne under the tree bearing the golden apples of discord, while beyond flows

"The river of Cocytus deep,
In which full many souls do endless wail and weep."

"Right. Here it is."

Otway turned the painting round on the easel, and each man leant forward in his chair or got up to look at it.

"I had Keats' line in my head," Otway continued:

"One faint eternal eventide of gems."

As for the general blackness, I have ignored that. Spenser was no colourist there."

His critics nodded and silently gazed at the picture. It was

full of sombre colour, the tones of deep-hued marble with here and there a sparkle of jewels. In that strange garden of the underworld, where fell neither dew nor rain, there was a vague suggestion of the affinity of plant and tree to stone.

"Sleeping poppy and black hellebore,"

and every dark narcotic growing in those borders seemed as though leaf and bloom were passing into translucent jade and white onyx, chrysolite and agate; their glimmer reflected in the sheen of the olive-black pavement as in a mirror. The pale light streaming upward from an unseen source shone full upon the unfinished figure of Persephone, sitting white-robed in her silver chair under the shadowing tree of discord with its glistening fruit, the sapphires in her girdle and on the hem of her garment shining like points of blue fire. Behind the tree rose columns of serpentine, dimly visible in the gloom; and beyond, yet more dimly seen, rolled the indigo waves of Cocytus.

"It's good!" said the bullet-headed one, and the others grunted assent.

"Yes, but what's the use of painting a good thing like that nowadays when nobody buys pictures," queried another.

"A fruiterer might buy it," suggested a third.

Otway thrust his hands into his pockets and regarded his painting with an air half-savage, half-affectionate.

"Look here, you fellows, I am doing it because I like doing it; because I felt impelled to do it, somehow."

"That's bad!" the critic shook his head. "There is too much of the artist in you, Jemmy, and too little of the bagman. The impulse to paint a subject should come, not from the man, but from the man's pocket. Is it empty? Then paint something that will sell."

"Nothing sells," observed the pessimistic one gloomily.

"Then don't paint."

"Never heed 'em, Jemmy," interposed another friend encouragingly. "You go ahead and hope for the fruiterer. The thing is first-rate."

"Oh, Jemmy is a millionaire; has he not two hundred a year or thereabouts? He need not trouble about that day of miracle, the day of payment."

"What's that?" inquired the pessimist. "Never heard of it!"

"I mean the day of paying one's debts," explained the speaker.

"Never heard of that either!"

"Why don't you finish the figure, Jemmy?" asked a man hitherto silent.

"Can't pay his model," suggested another.

"No model will do," said Otway. "I want hair that is not yellow, or red; but gold—spun gold. Celandine colour, the colour of spring. I once saw such hair on a Cornish head, and I am going down there to look for it."

"Same head?"

"No, that was fifteen years ago; when I was a boy. That hair will be faded or grey now."

"Why expect to find more gold hair? Do they grow it in Cornwall?"

"Well, they seem to. Did not Guenevere come from those parts? Anyway, I am off to-morrow to seek a Proserpina. Also, to look at two or three cottages an elderly cousin has just left to me."

"What! James, you are crawling into the cave of Mammon. We repudiate you. What artist owns land and beeves?"

"Precious little land and no beeves. Besides, to own land in these times is proof of poverty. I have some idea of settling down in one of the cottages if I can alter it to my liking."

"Hear him! 'Alter it to his liking!' When our Lares and Penates dwell in top attics!"

"Some of you might settle there too; in the other cottages. We could form a colony."

"Barbizon?"

"A sort of Barbizon. Why not?"

"We'll think it over."

Two days later Otway packed up his painting and departed west into a different world; a world of great spaces, of much light and clear air; a world of harmonious sound and gracious silence; and also possessing the charm of the wilderness. He was ten miles from the little town in which he was staying, and in that ten mile walk he had passed but two farms and spoken with one man, a shepherd. Here, standing on the edge of the cliff, looking into the sunset, while the Atlantic swung up with ceaseless thunder over the shingle far below, the artist felt the exhilaration of the return to the wilderness.

"And all this to breathe!" he ejaculated, rapturously inhaling the life-giving air. "All this—miles of it! and not a soul but myself within sight! All this instead of gasping for a scanty mouthful of sooty used-up stuff in company with five million other gaspers, packed like gold-fish in a bowl. Truly the ears of Midas have multiplied in these days!"

The west was scarlet-crimson, and a track of flame glittered across the vast plain of purple-blue water and over the grey cliff,

touching with red finger the masses of rock and scattered boulders that strewed the promontory on which Otway stood. He turned his back on the sea, following a narrow track that led obliquely to the left, where the cliff line was broken by a fan-shaped valley running inland from the beach. As he went along he noticed the effect of the ruddy light on the stones, the pools of shadow behind them, their sinister aspect as of watchers crouching on the headland. One great boulder, rather apart from the rest, seemed to owe something of its fashioning to the hands of man, and Otway stopped to observe it more closely.

"Looks like a sacrificial stone," he murmured. "Extraordinarily fantastic, those other rocks. Did they form a circle, I wonder? What ancient cantrips have they witnessed?"

Pulling out a sketch-book, he sat down on a smaller boulder and worked busily for half-an-hour; the crimson slowly fading in the west and the sea wind billowing round him. He was naturally happy and light-hearted, and his spirits were going up with every breath he drew, for is not the air of the Atlantic the true Elixir? Besides, all things were well with him. He had had a satisfactory interview with his cousin's lawyer that morning; had seen his new property, two houses and a couple of cottages, the latter picturesquely situated on the outskirts of the town, overlooking the tidal river.

"If these cottages were thrown into one, and a studio built, they would make a very comfortable house," Otway had remarked, and the lawyer had agreed. A third cottage, and a small farm, he said, were at some distance, about nine or ten miles away, near the shore, a lonely place. Farm and cottage a mile apart; both well let.

"Who lives in the cottage? A shepherd?"

"Oh no, the tenant is a queer old fellow named Paliaret, who is trying to find the Philosopher's Stone, or a new explosive; I don't know which."

"Are they not the same? I can hardly imagine a greater explosive than the Philosopher's Stone."

"Perhaps," Rosewarne laughed. "My wife does not sympathise with old Paliaret. She thinks him a brute. He spent all he had on this invention, whatever it is; and then, about five years ago, married a client of mine, an amiable foolish woman with some money."

"Did the money vanish in the crucible?"

"Most of it, I think. But Mrs. Paliaret has a niece living with them, so I suspect the household now depends mainly on this girl's little income. Luckily the money is tied up too securely

for Paliaret to get hold of it; my wife, however, is indignant that the girl should lead the life of a hermit for the sake of Paliaret's dream—it's nothing else."

"Ten miles, did you say? I might walk over there to-day and interview my tenants both at farm and cottage. Somebody ought to throw Paliaret over the cliff, and his chemicals after him."

"I could drive you there to-morrow. Perhaps I had better be present if you intend interrupting the alchemist's dream in so summary a manner!" and Rosewarne smiled.

"Possibly he is inventing a new torpedo. May it blow him sky-high! Thank you, I shall be glad to drive over with you to-morrow if I prefer to spend this afternoon in a little aimless exploring."

Otway's exploring led him in the direction of his distant property; he was attracted by the probable nearness of the farm to the sea, and thought he might perhaps lodge there for a week or two. In that case it would be easy to make the acquaintance of all his tenants in those solitary places. He missed the path several times, and also lingered by the way, beguiled by the witchery of the coast, so that here was sunset, and the farm apparently as far off as ever. But the twilight would be long and the night fair; he could return to the town by some inland road instead of the cliff paths. Even in these days the artist still remains close enough to Nature to ignore the fret and bondage of time as created by man.

Sitting sketching in leisurely fashion the singular rocks of the headland, Otway's thoughts wandered back to the two cottages he had seen that morning. Their situation was good; looking west and high above the river. Certainly he would have them knocked into one and build a studio. All that could be done by the autumn. Then he would ask Rayner and one or two other men down; Rayner was the bullet-headed landscape painter. The more Otway pondered over the idea the better he liked it. What a winter they would have! No fog, no noise, no dingy cheerlessness of lifeless cold; but clear sparkling air, the bright little town, the rushing river, and, not far away, the glorious sea.

He finished his sketch, rose to his feet, and with a last glance at the curious boulder standing apart, walked away to the left, where the cliff suddenly dipped into the narrow coomb. On the edge he paused a moment, looking down into the sheltered grassy glen, where bush and tree grew luxuriantly. Along the bottom a trout stream went singing to the sea, and beyond, on higher ground, where the valley widened landwards, was a white-washed

cottage with garden and orchard; and about thirty yards from the cottage, a shed with high peaked roof and skylights.

"I wonder whether all that is mine," thought Jemmy. "Is the shed old Paliaret's laboratory? Or is somebody using it as a studio? I'll go and ask my way to the farm."

He scrambled down an almost precipitous path, where jutting points of granite served as rough steps, and crossing the stream by a plank bridge, knocked at the cottage door. Apparently the inmates were absent, for no one replied to his knock, and there was no sound of movement within. All was silence save for the tinkling of the stream, the rustle of the leaves and the low thunder of the sea. He then tried the shed, equally in vain. Returning to the cottage, he called loudly, and receiving no answer, fell to contemplating the interior, the door being ajar and opening directly into the living-room. The table was laid for three, and Otway remembered that lunch was a long way behind and dinner had not yet arrived.

"Early supper, evidently," he soliloquised. "I have half a mind to help myself to the bread and cheese! People hereabouts must be accustomed to hungry tourists, and I can leave money on the table. Very likely this place is my property, and surely a landlord cannot burgle?"

He walked into the room, leaving the door wide open. The furniture was old and solid, and a tall bookcase held books not usually owned by a cottager.

"Paliaret's probably, or else they belong to a lodger," commented the artist. Then he laid three shillings conspicuously on the table and attacked the bread and cheese.

Ten minutes later a figure darkened the doorway; Jemmy looked up, and lo! Persephone stood before him, grave, beautiful, with hair of spun gold and "eyen grey as glasse."

"I beg your pardon," he said, getting up and wildly hunting for his card-case. "My name is Otway; I am staying in the town. I could not make anybody hear, so, feeling hungry, I thought of the three bears in the fairy tale, and hoped my unconscious entertainers would be equally charitable. You see my intentions were honest," he pointed meekly to the money lying on the table.

Youth is drawn to youth, there is instinctive comradeship; and Otway was young and friendly, pleasant of voice and good to look upon. The girl listened with an air of severity that gradually softened till a smile flickered in her eyes.

"I am one of the three bears," she replied demurely. "The other two are my aunt and her husband Mr. Paliaret."

"Paliaret!" exclaimed Otway. "Then I am his landlord. I will let him off a quarter's rent in exchange for bread and cheese; how will that do?"

"I have heard of less expensive bread and cheese."

"So have I. But anything for a quiet life! Besides, one must needs conciliate a magician. I am told that Mr. Paliaret raises the devil, or something like it."

"He has not yet succeeded," she said with a smile.

"No? It is easy enough. There is often considerable difficulty in raising the wind, but anybody can raise the devil. I will back a dozen fellows of my acquaintance to do it in less than two minutes. Is that shed the wizard's cell? I took it for a studio and expected to find a brother artist there."

"You are right about the shed, no one enters it except Mr. Paliaret. He has been afraid that the new landlord would turn him out; but we heard you were an artist, so he built hopes on that."

"I am glad we painters have a reputation for sweet reasonableness. Why should I turn him out? Rosewarne tells me he is a good tenant, and I might not get another. Few people would care to live so far from a town. It must be frightfully dull for you in winter."

"No," she replied, "I like it best then. There is the contrast of the stormy world without and the fire within. The days are short, with wonderful sunsets; and you are inclined to read. But in the long monotonous summer one needs more occupation and companionship. Even the farm—the nearest house—is a mile away. I wish this were a little farm, then there would be the amusement of the animals."

"It might be made into a little farm," suggested Otway.

"Mr. Paliaret would object to that, because it would bring people about the place. He fears anyone discovering the secret of his invention."

"Shall I turn him out? I do not care in the least whether the cottage is let or not. If I gave him notice to leave, he would be obliged to move nearer civilisation."

"Please don't! He might go to a worse place."

"He certainly will, if he does not behave better," said Jemmy. "When it comes to raising the devil, and keeping you and your aunt"—Jemmy cared nothing about the aunt, but thought it well to mention her—"in these wilds, really I begin to think it is my bounden duty to uproot the old gentleman. Inventors are notoriously the most unscrupulous of men."

"Give him six months' trial, he may have finished his invention by that time."

"Very well. Meanwhile I will keep an eye upon him. You spoke of a farm just now, Miss Paliaret,—oh, I beg your pardon, of course your name is not Paliaret."

"It is Dain,—Githa Dain. I think the farm belongs to you."

"I daresay it does. I was going on there when the bread and cheese lured me in here. Do you happen to know whether they would take a lodger? because a room there would suit me better at present than staying in the town."

For Otway was resolved to remain within easy distance of the cottage; he must cultivate these tenants of his. Here was his Proserpina. By-and-by he hoped he might be allowed to make a sketch of her for the silent gold-haired Queen of Shades. Besides, he was interested; he wished to see more of her.

"They had a lodger last summer," she said, answering his question, "an elderly gentleman who came for the fishing."

"Did he and the warlock go fishing together?" asked Jemmy, thinking that he too would go fishing with Paliaret.

"Oh no, he strongly disapproved of Mr. Paliaret, and I think he was right. They quarrelled about the old gods."

"The old gods!" repeated Otway in astonishment.

"He worships them," she went on with a little nod, "Mr. Paliaret, I mean. Perhaps you know there is an ancient sacrificial altar up on the cliff?"

"The large stone rather apart from the others?"

"That is it. The country people avoid that stone, they say it used to walk about. But Mr. Paliaret pours libations on it, the old libations of honey and milk, you know, and water."

"He must do it for a joke!"

"I think not. He really believes in the heathen gods; he is a heathen himself, and is proud of it. He goes to the stone nearly every night, and I have seen him pour the libations, for sometimes when he is late, aunt asks me to fetch him; she cannot climb that steep path."

"Does he not object to these extraordinary cantrips being observed?"

"He seems indifferent. Perhaps he imagines I do not notice. I only go to the top of the path, and call him from thence. My calling is quite useless, he seldom comes: but my aunt is satisfied when I tell her I have seen him."

"And if the night is dark?"

"Oh, then I do not go."

"Upon my soul!" ejaculated Otway, laughing, "this is worse

than summoning 'Auld Hornie,'—much worse! The wicked old pagan! Now I understand why he is so anxious to stay here, for elsewhere he might have to tramp miles to the scene of his nefarious worship. What does the parson say?"

"I do not suppose he knows."

"And your aunt?"

"Thinks everything that Mr. Paliaret does is right."

Otway laughed again, and his laughter was so joyous, so full of happy irresponsible amusement, that Githa must needs laugh also.

"But is it not dreadful?" she said, checking her mirth.

"Shocking! I shall be tempted to watch him myself! The old gods?—I came into Cornwall to find Proserpina."

"The daffodils are over."

"That remark tells me you read. But my Proserpina is Spenser's."

"Sitting in her gloomy garden?"

"Ah, I see you know Spenser. Few people read him."

"I have so much time for reading, and modern books are rare here."

"All the better! Modern literature is for middle age and for the fireside. For us, the Fields of Enna and the wine-dark sea!"

"And in old age, what?"

"In old age we toddle about the Fields of Enna again; we return to our first loves."

"Your picture, is it here?"

"In the town?—yes. I——" Jimmy stopped, for there was the sound of footsteps, and Githa turned her head towards the door.

"Here is my aunt," she said. "Please take away that money, Mr. Otway."

"It is evidence of my good intentions," he replied.

"But not needed. Aunt, this is our landlord, Mr. Otway."

Mrs. Paliaret, a thin faded woman with a plaintive voice, welcomed Jemmy graciously, ignoring his apologies.

"My husband will be very pleased to meet you," she spoke in a vague, uncertain manner. "I am afraid he is at present in his laboratory."

"Pray do not disturb him on my account, Mrs. Paliaret. I can call upon him to-morrow or any day which will suit him. I shall be your neighbour for the next few weeks, as I intend staying at the farm for awhile if they will take me in. How do I get there?"

"It is at the end of the valley," said Githa.

"Thank you. Then I shall hope to see Mr. Paliaret tomorrow." He said good-bye and went up the valley, congratulating himself on his new acquaintances and thinking of the face of Githa Dain.

"She is Persephone with the shadows of the underworld upon her," he reflected. "Such an existence as hers would make anybody look grave. Wonder if I can get any sort of a dinner at the farm. Or any sort of vehicle to take me back to Seabridge?"

The following day saw Otway and his impedimenta transferred to the farm, much to Rosewarne's amusement.

"What are you going to do out there?" he had inquired that morning.

"Why, make a sketch of that gold-haired girl if she will permit me, and then use it for my Proserpina. Incidentally I shall cultivate Paliaret, study farm life, and admire the coast scenery. Oh, I shall be busy enough!"

Throw an artist's tools and a few canvases about a room, and instantly it becomes habitable and cheerful. On arrival, Otway scattered his belongings with the usual happy result; setting the Proserpina on an easel in the best light the low sitting-room afforded. He was looking at it when Paliaret came in; a tall thin awkwardly-built man of perhaps sixty, with an odd furtive glance.

"Eyes not level; that's bad!" thought the artist as he rose to greet his visitor.

The conversation turned at first on the tenancy of the cottage. This being satisfactorily arranged, Paliaret moved his chair a little, the better to see the Proserpina.

"A fine painting," he observed politely. "Interesting also. I perceive the darker powers attract you."

"Not particularly," said Otway, "but Spenser's idea of the garden struck me as being a good subject."

"You wished to paint 'Shadows of Shadows,' and you have succeeded. But what cast these ancient shadows? A shadow is not self-existent. In short, who were the old gods?"

"A bad lot!" said Otway cheerfully. "The old gods seem to be incarnations of the most unpleasant qualities of mankind. Life must have been a pretty see-saw in those days, when you might either be made a god or sacrificed to one, and a toss-up which!"

"That sort of thing was more Phœnician than Greek or Roman, was it not? Though possibly an occasional human sacrifice might be offered."

"Sure to be. All nations gave their gods that kind of treat now and then, only it was habitual with some and merely spasmodic with others. Their frame of mind was that of Caliban upon Setebos, and they wished to appease their malevolent deities."

"Paul of Tarsus considered those deities to be living devils," said Paliaret, gazing at the picture with an aspect of brooding thought.

"Well, why not? I am disposed to agree with St. Paul."

"Therefore, it is but natural to propitiate these powers of the air."

"Great Pan is dead," remarked Jemmy lightly.

"He is not dead here," rejoined Paliaret. "We are beyond the Christian pale."

"What? In Cornwall, the land of saints?"

"They did not wholly oust the ancient worship, and when one settles in a country it is perhaps wise to conciliate the owners thereof."

"Not owners, fraudulent bailiffs; and I doubt the wisdom of conciliating them at the risk of the displeasure of the lord of the soil."

"They can give you your earthly wishes," said Paliaret, still darkly brooding. "They have a certain power over the elements."

"I am of the opinion of Sir Thomas Browne, that 'there is surely a piece of divinity in us, something that was before the elements, and owes no homage unto the sun.' So I should expect 'Peor and Baalim' to do homage to me!"

Paliaret hardly seemed to hear. "Do you recall," he asked, as though following a train of thought, "that Portuguese account of the Malay at the siege of Malacca who, covered with wounds that did not bleed, continued fighting till overpowered by numbers. When a bracelet of bone was taken from his arm he suddenly bled to death."

The artist nodded. "I know the story, but I don't believe it."

"Are you aware there are men in Ireland who can staunch flowing blood with a touch and muttered charm?"

"Yes, I admit that is a stupefying fact."

"Then if the flow of blood can be stopped by a charm nowadays, why not by a charm four centuries ago?"

"Well, the Malay story rests on Portuguese report, and our worthy allies have always borne a resemblance to the Cretans. I fancy my attitude is that taken up by most men who have thought about these matters—I am not sure whether I believe

them or not; on the whole, not; and in any case I think they are best left alone."

"Does the voice still cry in Kandy?"

"I do not know. Probably our occupation of Ceylon has had a calming effect," and Otway laughed.

Paliaret faced round, speaking with emphasis. "I am convinced that these powers—call them gods, devils, what you will—did occasionally grant the requests of their worshippers. What those requests were mattered nothing to the gods; they carelessly threw a coin, as it were, to the beggar. The gift is flung with indifference; it is an acknowledgment of homage rendered."

"And the more atrocious the act of homage the more likely are the gods to be pleased?"

"In a way, yes: though I do not accept the word 'atrocious.' You are thinking, I suppose, of the Druidical hecatombs?"

"Not especially; any human sacrifice is atrocious."

"Life has worse things to offer than a cut throat."

"And better."

"Besides," continued Paliaret, not noticing the interruption, "it all depends upon the purpose. I mean, if any important end would be gained, I think a human sacrifice might be justifiable."

"Ah," said Otway, "I think I have heard that before. But who is to judge of the importance of the end? If you reflect on it, you will see that that plea of expediency can be made to justify any and every crime. Also, it is the Pagan view. In the old Pagan world, the feeble and the helpless had no rights."

"My views are modern."

"Possibly. Time brings all fashions back, even Paganism. But apart from other considerations, I should fear the ultimate appeal unto Cæsar. Consent? Oh, that could only be obtained by undue influence of one kind or another, and would not affect the main point. For myself, I know that the old gods would wait a very long time before I should agree to be immolated to please any devil of them all for any reason whatever."

Paliaret turned his gaze on the Proserpina. "To succeed—that is definite, tangible. To see success fluttering like a butterfly before you;—now here, now gone! Nothing, no fancied rights, no obsolete morality, ought to stand in the way of capturing that fugitive knowledge which is needed for success."

"Pure Paganism, and as such, unlawful to Christian men."

"But suppose one is not a Christian man?"

"Why then," Jemmy grinned, "we Christian men will restrain the gods and their too enthusiastic worshippers."

"Soon there will be none of you to restrain us. Even now we

are strong enough to compel you to silence on many points which would have roused your grandfathers, not only to fury, but to energetic action."

"No doubt we are a drivelling lot," admitted Otway. "Nevertheless we shall win in the end."

Paliaret laughed, or rather, he uttered a short contemptuous bark; his manner of laughing. "A consoling conviction! My dear sir, I assure you that so long as one does not call things by their old names, they—no matter what they are—can be done."

"Not if an outer barbarian like myself happens to be within hail."

"There are not many of you interfering Samaritans," said Paliaret with another laugh. "The rest of the world are priests and Levites, wise men who keep to their own concerns."

"Then you acknowledge that the victim falls among thieves?"

"The motives of those men were low, mere vulgar robbery."

"I see," rejoined Otway. "A man's motives are everything, his actions nothing. If he attacks me because he wishes to pick my pocket, that is wrong; but if he attacks me because my death might assist him in some discovery, that is right! Oh, do not go yet, Mr. Paliaret," as his visitor rose, "stay and dine with me, and continue our argument. I do not know what the cooking here may be, but there is some good claret, I brought it with me."

"Thank you, not to-day. And I never take wine." Here Paliaret's eyes fell on the drawing Otway had made of the stones on the headland. He pointed to it. "I know that spot well. Are you using it in a painting?"

"No, I merely sketched the place because the stones were remarkable."

"They are. The site was probably chosen as a place of worship in old days on account of the spring close by; did you notice it? The water is good and mixes well with honey."

"Yes, it is good," assented Otway; "I was glad to find it when I got up there."

He accompanied Paliaret to the farm gate, and watched him as he disappeared in the winding of the valley.

"Off his head!" was the artist's comment. "Too much knowledge and too little brain, the modern complaint; and he has got it badly. Seems to me he is more than half crazy already."

After dinner Jemmy strolled seaward, walking slowly past the cottage, hoping his tenants might be lingering out of doors in the twilight. But only the cool night wind moved among the

tangled roses and the orchard trees; all was silent as on the previous evening.

"The old pagan might have the civility to come out and talk about trout or something," thought Jemmy, unreasonably disappointed that no glimpse of Githa Dain was vouchsafed to him. "Must manage better to-morrow," he reflected. "I will set up my easel under those elms just opposite the cottage, and sit there 'from morn till dewy eve.' No human being could help coming to look at me and my doings."

He climbed the steep path up to the top of the cliff, passing from the dusk of the valley to sea and land yet lit by an orange west; the fading light gleaming dull copper on the purple-blue of the waves, a purple streaked here and there with silver where the currents ran. Around him were the fantastic rocks he had sketched, and, a few yards away, the large boulder that long ago had been an altar of heathen worship; while to the right bubbled from out the stones the spring of which Paliaret had spoken.

Otway looked at it, recalling the dark history of the coast. Over the glittering sea had come ships of Tarshish with sails of linen of Egypt; here on the granite demons had been worshipped with gorgeous ritual and purple of more enduring stain than that of Tyre. Here, centuries later, the devils still held their ground, the sacrificial stone darkening the fair land with superstitious fear, despite the light of Christianity.

"The land is resting," thought Otway, "resting from bloodshed and evil worship. Wind and sun and storm, great spaces of clean air, are all purifying the soil."

Then it came to him that what we call desolation may be a time of cleansing repose for mother earth apart from the turbulent race of men; the dark-stained soil passing into flower of thyme and heather, untrodden save by simple folk akin to bird and bee; the evil stones slowly crumbling, being clothed upon with veiling moss and lichen. Otway noticed that round the large boulder the short grass was worn as by constant walking; did someone perambulate it? Was the someone Paliaret?

A yellow moon rose as the day died, and thin white mists rose with the moon, flowing along the grass like pale smoke, creeping and coiling among the rocks, rising and shifting about the taller stones, till the eye knew not rock from mist and beheld only gigantic changing phantoms.

"The place is uncanny," said Jemmy to himself, as he descended to the valley again, "downright uncanny. And so is Paliaret!"

Another hot blue day dawned, and by ten o'clock Otway had arrived under the elms opposite the cottage, on the farther side of the stream, his easel and canvases placed alluringly, and he himself, sketch-book in hand, making a drawing of the little house. Half-past ten—eleven, the sun moved away from the elms, surely—ah, there was the gleam of gold hair in the orchard, among the currant bushes and the apple-trees. Jemmy sprang up, crossed the rivulet, and standing outside the fence, offered his assistance.

“Do let me help,” said he imploringly. “I am such a good hand at gathering currants, particularly black ones, as there is less temptation to eat those.”

Githa Dain laughed softly; her grave reserve melting before the sunshine of Otway's presence. He looked so thoroughly happy, so full of joyous life, he inspired confidence; in short, it was good to have him to talk to.

“But are you not busy?” she asked. “I thought I saw you sketching.”

“Only for want of something better to do. I was hoping you would take compassion on a distracted artist and enable me to finish my Proserpina. I have a slight sketch of it there,” he nodded towards his camp. “The picture is too large to carry about. Mr. Paliaret saw it yesterday, no doubt he told you.”

“No, he never mentioned it.”

“Not? The unfeeling old warlock! I have half a mind to raise his rent!”

Again a laugh sparkled in the grey eyes. “I should like to see the picture; so would my aunt, I am sure. You say it is not finished?”

“The Queen of Shadows is herself but a shadow as yet,” he replied. “I brought a sketch of the painting here this morning in the hope that I might be permitted to make a drawing of you for the figure of Proserpina. If you would only give me two or three sittings under the elms yonder? They throw a capital shadow just in the right place. Let me show you the sketch.”

Otway was across the brook and back again in about half a minute, returning with a small canvas, at which Githa looked with interest.

“Of course this is roughly done,” he said, “but it gives an idea of the thing. I should like you to see the big painting. Will you and your aunt come to tea at the farm this afternoon?”

“Not this afternoon, I am afraid. Aunt is very busy to-day. But if you invite her for to-morrow I am almost sure she will accept.”

"Then that is settled. And about the sittings? Is my Proserpina to remain a shadow? Will you not give me a sitting now? Look at the comfortable chair placed for you under the elms."

She looked and smiled. "I am so sorry, but I cannot sit to you to-day. To-morrow morning perhaps."

"Thank you. If you were an artist in search of a Proserpina you would understand my feelings of gratitude and relief. The morning is the best time, because the shadows fall right then. And in the afternoon you and Mrs. Paliaret will come and see me at the farm. By the way, must I ask Paliaret, too?"

"I think it would be better, though he will probably refuse. He prefers to see people alone when he sees them at all. How did you like him?"

"'For that olde man of pleasing wordes had store,'"

quoted Otway sagely.

"Oh, yes, he is like Archimago! I never thought of that! Yes,

"'He to his studie goes; and there amidde
His magic bookes and artes of sundrie kindes,
He seekes out mighty charmes.'"

"And calls upon

"'The prince of darkness and dead night,'"

added Jemmy. "Well, Archimago came to a bad end through his enchantments, let Paliaret take heed! Wizards never seem to get much enjoyment out of life, do they? They spend all their time hanging over crucibles when they might be picking currants in a sunny garden. Has he been offering those wicked libations lately?"

"I think not, but he will to-night, for he has ordered honey and milk to be ready this evening."

"Disgraceful! I must really stroll on to the headland at the witching hour and behold these pagan rites. What is his time?"

"Usually between eleven and twelve. I must go now, Mr. Otway."

"But the currants are not yet picked—off their stalks, I mean."

"Oh, that will be done indoors. Good-bye!"

"It is much better done out of doors!" he called after her, but Githa laughingly shook her head and disappeared; and Otway returned to his camp, well pleased with his morning.

Late in the afternoon Rosewarne drove over to the farm.

"My wife is spending the evening with a friend," said he; "so I thought I would come over and see how you were getting on."

"First-rate!" replied the artist. "I am enjoying myself amazingly. You will stay to dinner, of course?"

"Thanks, yes. What about Paliaret? Have you seen him?"

"He called upon us yesterday and I was much entertained by his conversation; but I am of opinion that his torpedo, or his elixir, or whatever it is, has unhinged his mind, and he is on the verge of becoming dangerous."

"Hardly that," said Rosewarne placidly. "People have queer whims nowadays, and he was always eccentric. You look very comfortable here," glancing round Otway's sitting-room.

"Am I not? And the light is not bad for painting. Observe how from this window I command the valley for a considerable distance; from the other, I have an excellent view of the pigsties. I keep that window shut. But I have made some capital studies of pigs. I will show them to you after dinner."

"Have you made that drawing of Githa Dain for your picture?" asked the lawyer as they sat down to table.

"Not yet; I hope to begin to-morrow. By the way, her name is uncommon. How did she come by it?"

"She was born and baptized at Stoke, and the church there was founded by Githa, the mother of Harold."

"Ah, I see. I wonder the name is not more used. My Proserpina had a marvellous effect on Paliaret yesterday. At the sight of it he sprang upon his hobby and set off at a tearing gallop, smashing fences in the most outrageous fashion. Seriously, Rosewarne, that girl ought not to be there."

"Her money is safe. Paliaret cannot get hold of it; he and the aunt can only spend the interest."

"Her money—pooh! I am thinking of graver matters than money. He will be going off his head presently; what could two women in a lonely cottage do with a maniac?"

"He is not that yet," said Rosewarne. "I think you are mistaken."

"Have you noticed his eyes?"

"Not particularly."

"One eye is higher than the other, which is not a good start in life for anybody. We artists observe such things, and when a man like that talks about the efficacy of human sacrifices and the wisdom of worshipping the old gods, one begins to reflect

as to what may possibly happen. He reminds me much too strongly of a fairy-doctor I once saw in Ireland."

"Did the fairy-doctor do anything remarkable?"

"Merely advocated the roasting of a supposed changeling. The law objected and called it manslaughter."

"Hard on the fairy-doctor! But I do not imagine Paliaret is likely to roast anybody."

"Farmer Mallam here is positive he sacrificed a black lamb up on the headland last spring."

The lawyer burst out laughing. "No—no, I don't believe that."

"I think it quite possible. He bought the lamb and it disappeared. Now, as Mallam puts it, 'what became o' thicky lamb?'"

"They ate it."

"Not so. Mallam's daughter is maid there, and she never saw any lamb, alive or dead."

"Why did not Mallam go and look on the headland for traces of the sacrifice?"

"That was what I asked when I heard the tale, but it seems that the stone up there has a past; its reputation is such that decent folk avoid its neighbourhood."

"What could Paliaret do with the remains? He could not burn them, as the flame would be seen; and lights are not allowed there lest they should cause wrecks."

"With no onlookers, it is easy enough to dig a hole and bury anything."

"True. Besides, there is the sea. Still, even if he did offer up the lamb to his ancient gods, I am not disposed to attach any great importance to it. Dozens of men have queer crazes; Paliaret is only one among many."

Jemmy shook his head. "He is one by himself, and his craze too queer to be safe. I wish you could have heard him yesterday! The mildest mediæval bishop would have promptly burnt him."

"No doubt," assented Rosewarne laughing, and the conversation drifted away from Paliaret.

The night was clear and the moon at the full.

"I am later than I intended to be," remarked the lawyer as he clambered into his dogcart. "Never mind, I shall be home at midnight or thereabouts."

"I think I will take a stroll on the headland and see whether Paliaret is worshipping the triple Hecate," said Otway; "it is about the right time for his antics."

"Well, don't throw him over the cliff as an offering to the sea-deities."

"No, I will not. I will do more wisely. If his antics are in any way picturesque, I will make a sketch of him by moonlight and sell it as an ancient Phœnician."

"Do, and show it to me. Good night!" and Rosewarne drove away. Late though it was, there were lights in the cottage as Jemmy walked seaward. "The old man is evidently out cultivating his gods," he thought. "I had better not show myself too soon." And he climbed the cliff path cautiously, lest the sound of his footsteps should betray his presence. For the wonderful night was very still, the hiss and rustle of the waves far below on the shingle seeming to deepen the hush. Overhead was the hyacinth-blue of the sky; in front, the dim sapphire of the sea, changing in the moonlight to veiled turquoise; and between sea and sky the dusky land and wide ocean of cool pure air.

"A harmony of blues!" murmured the artist, "blues too subtle to be painted. Yet, one might perhaps put even these colours of gloom upon canvas. What a night!"

'On such a night
Stood Dido on the wild sea banks.'

Now I wonder whether I shall find Paliaret on the wild sea banks."

Keeping behind the scattered masses of rock, Otway slipped from shadow to shadow, till he was within thirty yards of the open space where stood the great boulder. Yes, there was Paliaret, standing with uplifted hands before the stone.

"I believe the idolatrous idiot is positively chanting to the moon!" muttered Jemmy, peering round the rock that screened him. "Oh, he's clean crazy! Hullo! here's somebody coming." For his ear had caught the tinkle of a dislodged pebble falling down the cliff path. Had Githa been sent to call Paliaret home?

A moment more and she came into sight, pausing at the top of the path, her white gown shining and her gold hair pale in the moonrays. Her appearance added to the unreality of the scene, she might have been a spirit answering the summons of a necromancer, so weird—so phantasmal seemed everything; the soft blue darkness, the rocks, Paliaret gesticulating by the great stone, the moonlight full upon him as upon the white figure of the girl. Otway drew out his sketch-book, and began sketching rapidly.

"Here!" shouted Paliaret, perceiving Githa, "take this away!" He held out a glittering object that Otway recognised as a silver cup he had seen in the cottage.

The girl crossed the grassy space between the edge of the cliff and the great boulder; and the artist, thinking he would walk home with her, advanced from out the rock-shadow that had screened him. His presence, however, seemed unnoticed by either Paliaret or Githa. She reached the stone, took the cup from Paliaret's hand, and then

* * * * *

"But tell me exactly what happened," said Rosewarne the next day.

"How do I know what happened!" replied Otway. "When you are in the thick of anything you never know what happens—you are much too busy! It was a regular nightmare! I was walking quietly up to them when Gith—I mean Miss Dain—suddenly screamed, and I cleared the space between us in about half a second. Paliaret had seized her by the arm, and was striking at her with a big knife—it was horrid to see it flashing in the moonlight! She warded off the first blow with the cup; I heard the jar of the blade on the silver. It glanced off and cut her arm badly, but before he could stab again I was there. I caught his wrist with one hand, and pulled the girl away with the other, throwing her behind me. Then I had a pretty tough tussle with Paliaret! He was a raving maniac, and came at me like a wild cat, screaming curses on me because I was ruining him, robbing the gods of their due, and a lot more of the same kind of thing. It was as much as I could do to hold him, upon my soul it was! I could not have believed that a man of his age could have given me so much trouble. But, of course, age does tell. In less than a minute I felt him weaken, and then I got in one that stunned him. Very unpleasant to hit an old man like that, but what could I do? He dropped, and I tied his hands with my handkerchief. Miss Dain was quite calm and self-possessed, though her arm was badly cut and she looked ready to faint. Leaving Paliaret lying by the stone, I took her back to the cottage. We arranged on the way that I should tell Mrs. Paliaret the old man had had a fit of delirium, and that I should fetch him and mount guard over him till the morning."

"How did the aunt take it?" inquired Rosewarne, listening with deepest interest.

"Insisted on going with me; and when we got on the headland Paliaret had vanished as completely as though he had been carried away by the devils he worshipped. That gave me a

scare. I thought he had slipped his bonds and was making for the cottage. So I persuaded Mrs. Paliaret to return home, saying I would go and look for him among the rocks. She was much annoyed with both of us, her niece and myself, I mean; evidently thinking we were somehow responsible for Paliaret's going off his head."

"Best that she should take it that way."

"Oh yes, I did not care; only I thought it tolerably cool as regards her niece. Well, I saw her into the cottage, and then I went away ostensibly to seek for Paliaret, but in reality I sat down behind a bush within a few yards of the door; I dare not go farther off. I felt convinced that if he returned, his wife would at once open the door, and then what might happen? It was better that a madman should be roaming the country than murdering somebody in his own house. So there I sat till daylight, when the maid and the milkman arrived together, and I heard that the farmer was organising a search party to look for me, as I had not appeared all night. The end of it all was that we found Paliaret on the beach—dead, of course—having evidently fallen from the cliff. He must have pitched or rolled over on purpose, for, as you know, the edge is nearly two hundred yards from the stone, and not a slope either till you get close to the verge. I am sorry for the poor crazy chap, but wherever he is now it must be better than a lunatic asylum, where he must have gone if he had remained in this world. You see I was right about his view of sacrifices."

"Yes," said Rosewarne, "I was wrong there. You think he had resolved to sacrifice the girl that night?"

"Oh no, for how could he be sure she would come? I imagine the idea had been hovering in his mind some time, and the opportunity presenting itself, his half-crazy brain gave way entirely, and he attacked her. Had I not been there—well, I do not like to think about it."

"Your accidental presence was most providential."

"It was undoubtedly providential," observed Otway gravely, "therefore not an accident."

"Again you are right," assented the lawyer.

Three weeks later Otway was sitting in the Rosewornes' drawing-room, talking to Githa Dain.

"So Mrs. Paliaret has gone to live in Gloucester?" he remarked.

"Yes, she has friends there, and will be happier away from the sad memories here. I am afraid you will have the cottage on your hands."

"That does not matter. Besides, my friend Rayner writes that he and another man wish to hire a cottage for the winter. I daresay they will take it. But yourself? May one ask if you have any plans?"

"I shall stay here with the Rosewarne for a time, and then look for a little house in the town. I must live somewhere, and I should like to be near Mrs. Rosewarne and my other friends in Seabridge."

"You have seen the house I am making out of the two cottages above the river, how would that suit you?"

"Excellently, it is charming. But I understood that you intended to live there."

"So I did, so I do, if you do not object. I thought perhaps you would be so good as to marry me, then I could live there too. Think of it," he urged, seeing the colour deepen in her cheek. "We could go abroad till the house is finished; the change would do you good, and we could be back by October, ready for a glorious winter among our friends; and run up to town in the spring just to see the Proserpina hung on the line—which of course it will be."

"I have never given you the sittings I promised," she said.

"No, which is another reason for marrying me; you could give me the sittings quite at your leisure. If you did not care to live here, I would live anywhere you wished. An artist is not tied to a neighbourhood."

"It must be very pleasant to be an artist."

"It is very pleasant to be an artist's wife, I assure you," declared Jemmy audaciously. "We make such good husbands. Only try me and see!"

This appeal proved irresistible, Githa laughed outright.

"I will think about it," she said.

There was a gathering of Otway's friends in his old studio in town, and Rayner, standing in the midst, waved an open letter.

"Jemmy is going to marry his Proserpina," he announced, "and next week I trot down there to be best man. Morton is going too."

"Why Morton?" inquired one.

"Because," said Morton, "Rayner and I have taken a cottage in the wilderness belonging to Jemmy. You can all come if you like, we'll put you up. You can sleep in rows on the kitchen floor."

"Fares!" uttered the pessimist gloomily. "Excursion time is over, and railway companies have no bowels of compassion. They

might take the lot of us cheap, like a school treat or a ton of foreign fruit, but not they ! ”

“ Pooh ! ” said Rayner, “ we can club together and go down in a cattle-truck if necessary. ”

“ Not allowed ! ”

“ I know that. I spoke figuratively. You can come easily enough. Living is cheap ; lots of grass to browse on. ”

“ And thistles ? ”

“ And thistles, certainly. ”

“ Well, ” observed the pessimist, “ eating them down there is better than sitting on them here. I vote we go ! ”

So the brotherhood mustered in force at Otway’s wedding.

C. L. ANTROBUS.

The Last Mitchell.

By MARGERY WILLIAMS.

I.

THE Allans chanced upon Kinlow House through the agency of *Country Life*. After much wearisome scanning of advertisement columns and house-agents' lists, where all evidence pointed to the impossibility of renting any kind of hovel in England for less than two hundred and fifty pounds a year on a three years' lease, the modest announcement of five lines, tucked away, beneath eulogies of Elizabethan manor-houses, at the very bottom of the page, seemed to Mrs. Allan at least a direct answer to prayer.

They had decided as early as January to go somewhere into the country for the whole summer, but it seemed, by the end of April, that summer would have come and gone before they could find any place where Allan's income would permit of their laying their heads. He was a black-and-white artist, and when work had of a sudden capriciously hammered at his door three years after his marriage, he had flung himself upon it with an enthusiasm of which his present state of health was the outcome. That, at least, was his wife's explanation. He knew himself that he was suffering less from the overwork of eighteen months than from the strain of the years when he had done nothing at all. He said that he had got into a groove; that he wanted three months' quiet in some place where there was good fishing, where he could hatch ideas, dig in the garden, and find something worth painting.

It was a question how far Kinlow House, Rennuthnoe, Cornwall, would meet these requirements, but much unprofitable house-stalking had driven the Allans to a point when they would accept anything that the gods offered and they could afford. The advertisement, and the London agent whom Allan interviewed, represented the house as standing in a spacious garden, overlooking

the sea. The garden, in realisation, was a little bigger than the average suburban back-yard, a tangle of weeds and neglected vegetables shut in by high white stone walls that gave it the effect of a Spanish prison courtyard; and the agent, in his rhapsodies upon the purity of the water-supply, omitted to mention that it had all to be carried into the house, in buckets, from the small iron pump outside the kitchen-door.

But the sea was there, blue and shining, almost under their windows—the south wall of house and garden was in fact a continuation of the cliff face, dropping precipitously some forty feet down to a narrow belt of rocks and shingle, which smelt vilely, at certain tides, of decaying fish—and there were clipped box bushes in front of the house, and a tangle of tamarisk at the gateway, with fairylike plumes tinted delicate pink and bronze, like the seaweed one picks up, flotsam from the gulf stream, after spring tides. Yellow stonecrop, and tufts of the pinkish weed called “Bouncing Betty” grew riotously along the top of the high garden walls, and Allan summarized his opinion of their bargain after his first boyish tour of exploration. “Fancy getting a bay tree and a pump in the back yard for six pounds a month!”

The London train was delayed, and there was only time, before dusk, for a hurried inspection. The village woman who was there on behalf of the local house-agent to look after their comfort, had a meal which might have been either late tea or early supper, spread for them in the dining-room; cold meat and fried potatoes, “splits,” and a dish of Cornish cream. One went down two steps from the narrow hallway into the dining-room, which was furnished plainly and solidly, as was the rest of the house; ugly horsehair chairs and imitation mahogany of half a century ago. There was a shabby middle-class dignity about all the furniture, a curiously established air. Everything looked as if it had been there always, had grown fast to floor and walls. The rooms had less the atmosphere of a house which has been shut up than of one in which many generations of people had been born and grown up and died, without stirring beyond their own doorstep. There was the odd impression of tenancy peculiar to old houses, making it seem, at the end of many years’ emptiness, as though the last dwellers had moved out only the day before.

Three-year-old Rodey had slept, oblivious to the jolting of the train, during the last half of the journey, and he roused only to eat a drowsy supper of bread and milk before Allan carried him upstairs to be tucked into a corner of the square old-fashioned bedstead. His own cot was coming down by goods train, together

with Allan's painting traps and the few things they had stowed into one large packing case, to make their three months' stay in another person's house more intimately homelike. The child had been pale and fretful of late; his mother hoped everything for him from an open-air summer by the sea. As she pulled the covers up closer to his small sleep-flushed face she said: "I do hope, now we've come, that the place will suit him."

"Suit him?" said Allan. "Of course it will suit him. He can be out of doors every hour of the day if he likes."

They left the door ajar, to hear the child if he woke, and went downstairs. The woman—she had introduced herself as Mrs. Jago—had lighted a lamp on the dining-room table, a hideous affair with a pink globe patterned with wild roses. Mrs. Allan remembered with comfort that their own studio lamp was coming down next day with the rest of the things. Allan lit a cigarette.

"This room is confoundedly close," he said, sniffing. "Let's go outside. You can hear the boy if he calls."

The front garden was smaller than the back, and less neglected in aspect. What little grass there was had been recently cut, and the box clumps gave out, in the evening air, a pleasant pungent smell. The wall on the cliff-side was low; they leaned upon the stone coping, and watched the moonlight make a limpid silver path across the sea.

"Isn't that great?" said Allan. "Fancy having this to look at every evening. Isn't it fine?"

His wife was standing by him, and he slipped his arm boyishly round her waist. "You ought to have a wrap on," he said. "I suppose the evenings always get cool here. Shall I fetch your jacket?"

"Never mind."

The moon-ripples seemed to swim and heave, merging far out into a narrowing streak of pure whiteness. A dark spot, nearer the shore, showed where a rock broke the current.

"I feel as if we were going to be happy here," she said presently. "It's the first summer we've had all to ourselves since we were first married. We always seem to have been stuck round with other people, somehow. It'll be a kind of a second honeymoon."

He laughed.

"Then we ought to have sent Rodey to Scotland with your sister!"

"Oh, Rodey won't be in the way."

"Well, he's outside the scheme," said Allan.

"You'll be able to get your fishing now."

"Yes. We can fish out of the bedroom windows at high tide. You'll see how soon Rodey will get on to that game."

"I'm going to have his cot put in the front room. You must go down to-morrow morning and see the man at the station about having the things brought up. I do like the house, Dane. It's better even than the advertisement said. Of course, the rooms aren't awfully big, but we don't really need that, in summer. I think it's wonderfully cheap."

"It's so wonderfully cheap," said Allan, "that I'm beginning to wonder whether there isn't a reason."

"What do you mean?"

"Ghosts!"

"Dane!" she said indignantly.

"Ghosts!" he returned calmly. "The kind of ghosts that crawl up pipes and through crevices, and stalk along the passages, particularly in damp weather. Greenish, scummy ghosts, with phosphorescent eyes, that come through locked doors and grip you by the throat when you're asleep. Ghosts——"

He was clawing the air dramatically with his fingers. His wife's half nervous laugh changed suddenly into seriousness.

"You don't think the drains are wrong?"

"No," said Allan. "I never think anything. And in any case," he continued cheerfully, "we've got the place on a three months' agreement, so we have to see it out."

"I do think you are horrid," said his wife.

II.

Mrs. JAGO had contracted to stay for three days and see them "settled in," pending the engagement of a girl from the village. In the event it was decided that she should stay on altogether, coming in each morning from her home in the village and going back at night. She was a tall angular lady of indomitable will, which happily took the turn of a determination to shelter the Allans under her wing from the moment of their arrival in the house. She had a sharp kindly Cornish tongue, and a withering contempt—equally Cornish, as they discovered later—for all her neighbours. She condemned Rennuthnoe as the talkiest place in Cornwall in a tone which hinted at bitter experience, and laid great stress upon the fact that she herself came from Trescoe parish; her people were all Trescoe people. She cooked quite admirably, and she was honest; she said so.

These qualifications, especially when they took into account the hair-lifting tales, of a rustic directness, which Mrs. Jago

related to them of such girls in the village as were available for service, were felt to outbalance a habit of singing chapel hymn-tunes at her work, and the attitude of rigid equality which led her to address her mistress invariably as Mrs. Allan, and Allan himself, in moments of absent-minded kindness, as "my son."

Kinlow House was the last house in the village. The cliff itself only extended a few hundred yards beyond. The ground sloped gently then to where the sea, curving inland, met a crescent sweep of fine white sand, backed by a stretch of low sand-hills and links, covered with sparse coarse grass, that took fleeting tones of grey and silver as the wind touched it. Beyond this low-lying strip, some three-quarters of a mile in extent, which was called the burrows, the cliffs began again, rugged and desolate at their edge and merging inland into rolling spaces of brown ploughed land and yellow cornfields. A tiny square-towered church seemed, viewed from Rennuthnoe, to sit on the rise of the farthest cliff. When the wind came from the eastward one could hear on Sunday evenings a faint far-off tinkle, like a sheep-bell, calling Trescoe folk to prayer.

Rennuthnoe itself was little more than one long street, straggling up-hill, where tiny white-washed houses with thatched roofs jostled each other forward till they were held at a final standstill by the high back wall of the Allans' garden. There were several small shops of indiscriminate trade and four public-houses, one of which was called the Godolphin Hotel. You bought stationery at the post-office, ironmongery at the saddler's, tobacco at the hairdresser's and tape and reels of cotton at the grocer's.

The smaller houses fetched their water supply from little iron hydrants at adjacent street-corners, and if the turncock, the next important personage to the village constable, wanted to go to bed early, the water was cut off at seven o'clock, and improvident villagers had to go thirsty and unwashed till the next morning. Once, within recent memory, there had occurred a fire in Rennuthnoe, in which two women had been burned to death because the water had been turned off—it was at a quarter to nine in the evening—and the constable had mislaid the key belonging to the shed where the fire-engine was kept. It was found, after three-quarters of an hour's fruitless hunting, hanging behind a cracked teacup on one of the top hooks of the dresser in the constable's kitchen.

This tale and others of a kindred nature Mrs. Jago related with a view to cheering and amusing the Allans over their meals, in the intervals of bringing in the dishes. She told also of the corpse-lights seen on the burrow sands before the wreck the

previous winter, and how the body of the man drowned at Trescoe had been washed up, three weeks later, at Rennuthnoe water-stairs, where the fishermen tied their boats, half eaten by crabs and with green seaweed in his beard.

"He was a Rennuthnoe man, and he belonged to come back to Rennuthnoe," she said, a dogged statement of rights, the insistence upon which, on part of the unknown corpse, struck the Allans as selfish and inconsiderate. But their enthusiasm for Rennuthnoe survived these anecdotes unchilled, and was not even seriously damped by the discovery, made one day at low water, that the sewage of the entire upper village drained seaward through the rocks which lay just under their bed-room windows, thus accounting for a certain haunting odour which the house-agent had assured them was only the wholesome smell of seaweed.

"If it hasn't killed other people," said Allan, philosophically, "I don't see any reason why it should begin with us. And you never saw a healthier lot of children anywhere than there are around here."

The sea and fresh air were making a new man of Allan. He spent two weeks in a fine *lazzaroni* idleness, lying out on the rocks in the sunlight during long mornings and longer afternoons while his wife read or sewed and Rodey harried the small warm pools where strange little sea-people dwelt between the tides. He had said when he first got down there: "Newnes and the whole blessed lot of 'em can wait. I'm going to take three clear weeks to do nothing in." But long before the third week was out he began to talk of "getting those drawings off," and to pull his painting things about restlessly, with one eye out of window on the vivid rainbow sea.

He took to work again freshly, almost hungrily, and his wife noticed, with a gladness too wise for comment, that a certain morbid depression, a nervous irritability, which had dogged the last three months of his town life, had disappeared, giving way to boyish good spirits. He ate better, smoked less, laughed freely; took long tramps in the fresh sea air and came home hungry and healthily tired. Rodey, too, was already looking stronger. She felt that the summer was going to prove a good one for all of them.

III.

THE original tenants and owners of Kinlow House had been named Mitchell. A Mitchell had built the house so far back as 1807, and succeeding Mitchells, or Mitchell connections, had lived in it up to within the last few years. This much, with some vague

generalities of Mitchell history, the Allans had learned from the house-agent, and also at moments from Mrs. Jago, who had the history of most Rennuthnoe folk at her finger tips. They recognised early that Kinlow House was known generally as "Mitchell's," but it was not until they had been in Rennuthnoe some weeks that they discovered their own position in the village regard to be simply that of the people at Mitchell's.

They bowed smilingly to this assertion of an individuality which the old house had had, for them, on the first day of their arrival. It was as if long association with its own particular human-kind had imparted to the dwelling itself a personality so distinct that it was capable of absorbing all minor personalities into its own. It was essentially a private house. It would tolerate the intrusion of strangers; its attitude toward them was one of reserved dignity, courteous welcome, but it would never let them forget, in its fine hospitality, that they were dining off Mitchell china, sitting on Mitchell chairs. The Allans even entered into its feelings so far as to be glad, for the house's own sake, that they were who they were; guests sufficiently appreciative not to abuse hospitality. They felt that through providence they had been permitted to save the house from the intrusion of others possibly less delicate than themselves; people who might have set out a croquet court on the front lawn, altered the position of the furniture, scratched initials on the window glass. Then, indeed, they felt, might Kinlow House have arisen in wrath and denounced them. But the mere thought, when one sat in the dim low-ceiled dining-room, where the floor creaked softly, at times, as to the footstep of some Mitchell dead and gone, was an affront. It would have been easier to make free with Osborne House or the Tower of London.

It was Mrs. Allan who first collected any details about the Mitchells. She went down one morning to interview casually, across the counter, the Rennuthnoe post-mistress. Her private reason was to ascertain, the discovery of the drainage system having stuck in her mind, what proportion of the last tenants of Kinlow House had died of typhoid. But the health-bill, it appeared, was clean. No one had ever had typhoid there, though there had been a case of small-pox, thirty-one years before, when the nephew of the then resident Mitchell had brought the disease back with him from the West Indies. Having cleared the local character so far, the post-mistress settled herself, knitting in hand, to talk of the Mitchell family with a freedom which made her listener glad that Kinlow House, a quarter of a mile up the straggling village street, was presumably beyond earshot.

The Mitchells, so far back as could be remembered, had been mine owners. One half of Rennuthnoe had always been related to the other half, by successive intermarrying, as is the way in most Cornish villages, and the only person in the village who was not in some indirect way connected with the Mitchell family was the Other Mitchell, the man who had the new house down by the station, and who came from Helston.

The family record was no better nor worse than that of their neighbours. They had drunk and cheated, married and given in marriage; broken most of the commandments, always in a friendly and respectable way, and brought up their children in reverence for the Mitchell family, down to the era of Jethro Mitchell, the last dweller of the name in Kinlow House.

He was part-owner of the mine at Tregerris, which had stood idle these twelve years past for want of money, a desolate jumble of rusted machinery and half-driven shafts, a monument of wasted fortunes. This Jethro Mitchell—old Jethro, the post-mistress called him; she herself was fourth cousin to his brother-in-law—had led for many years a life which stood out in glaring colours even against the fabric of Rennuthnoe existence—where every second home had a skeleton in its cupboard, and no one dared fling stones at their neighbours—and at the age of fifty joined the Methodist Church, and settled down to criticise his neighbours' morals, and retrieve by a belated example those of his own immediate ancestors. He had one son, who, dying in Falmouth of the same fever which carried off his young wife, left to his care a small lad of seven, named after his grandfather.

In the old Mitchell house Jethro and his grandfather and one old servant lived, aloof from their neighbours, till the boy was nineteen. Young Jethro was the one living soul that Old Mitchell cared for. He had never shown any feeling towards his own son, but this tiny boy touched some long-forgotten spring in the old man's heart, brought near to him again his own spent youth. He loved him with a jealous passionate love that broke down years of selfishness and hardness, and was doomed by its very intensity to defeat its own ends. For him he saved and pinched and denied many comforts to his old age. He spent money ungrudgingly on his education, determined to make of him a man who should redeem the family record, should vindicate his pride of race; only to find in the end his own buried sins rise up and smite him through the hand of the boy he loved.

He sent young Jethro to a good school, and, later, to college, where he had an unbrilliant, yet in the main satisfactory, record.

It was when he came back to Rennuthnoe, the first summer after the termination of his college career, that the sordid commonplace tragedy began. It was a simple matter enough, merely the reassertion, after a generation's respite, of the old bad Mitchell blood. Brought up in the narrow unbeautiful tenets of the Methodist Church, there was bound, sooner or later, to come a reaction. The boy was scarcely to blame; he was only paying, with interest, nature's debt for the forgotten wildness of his forefathers. It was nakedly, mercilessly, his grandfather's youth over again. He took to evil as instinctively as to his native element. It began with drinking, and association with the lowest of the village riff-raff. For a long time old Jethro shut himself determinedly from rumour, in a fierce pride that would fight to the last before it acknowledged defeat. Later there came ugly scandals that could not be hushed up, and the drama terminated one evening in the quiet living-room of Kinlow House. There were hot words, passionate recrimination on both sides, and old Jethro Mitchell, under sway of the one bitter disappointment of his life, turned his grandson from the house, forbidding him with a curse to cross its threshold again.

That night's work, which broke the elder Jethro's pride, shattered his life also. He was not a very old man then, only seventy-three; the Mitchells had all married early. Though he lived for several years after, his grandson killed him as surely as if he had struck him down where he stood. His religion, a surface growth at best, failed him when he most had need of it. He never went to chapel again, never willingly looked his neighbours in the face. He dragged out four dishonoured irritable years, unloved and unpitied, feared by his servants and disliked by the village, and on his death Kinlow House passed to a nephew of another name in Penzance.

The post-mistress remembered young Jethro well. Mrs. Allan gathered from her gossip that whatever his faults, he had incurred no very lasting enmity in Rennuthnoe.

"He came down the street here, the morning he left, to say good-bye, laughing and joking. He always carried his head high, even when he had the drink on him. It near killed him to go; there was never a Mitchell yet that wasn't body and bone of the place he was born in. Everyone liked Mr. Jethro. He had the way with him; you couldn't help it. What, dearie? They're a penny, those pencils."

As Mrs. Allan watched the small Rennuthnoe damsel, bare-footed and cotton-frocked, reaching on tip-toe to the counter, there came back to her oddly Mrs. Jago's words about the

fisherman. "He was a Rennuthnoe man, and he belonged to come back to Rennuthnoe."

"Is Mr. Jethro dead?" she asked, when the child had gone.

"Dead? Not that I've heard of. Most likely he's made a fortune and settled down somewhere. The Mitchells always did fall on their feet," she quaintly added.

IV.

WHEN Mrs. Allan got back to the house, she found her husband in the sitting-room, working at his last drawing for the *Fortnightly Illustrated*. It represented a woman in evening dress kneeling by the bed-side of a dying man. His wife had posed for the figure of the woman. Models ran into money, and she always helped him out where she could. She leaned across the table now, viewing the picture upside down, and began at once to launch the history of the Mitchells upon him, while she watched the precise, leisurely sweep of his brush, putting in high lights on the woman's hair.

"I believe Jethro Mitchell is dead," she said, when she had finished. "He must be dead, or he'd have come back. Don't you think so, Dane?"

Allan's pipe had gone out. He rested the edge of the drawing-board against his knee while he felt for his tobacco pouch.

"I don't see why."

"But if he cared for the place so much as all that."

"I should think he had time to get over it."

He glanced about the littered table, and she found the matches and handed them to him.

"I'd like to know," she persisted.

"It seems to me," said her husband, when he had lighted his pipe, "from what one gathers, that the people in Rennuthnoe, take them altogether, are a pretty rotten lot. I should advise Jethro Mitchell, if he contemplates coming back, to delay his visit until we are out of the house."

"What do you mean?"

He laughed.

"I mean that I should take him by the shoulders, gently but firmly, as the novelists say, and put him outside."

"Dane! It's his own home."

"Where does the nephew in Penzance come in?"

"I don't care." She unpinned her hat and laid it down on the table, shaking back the hair from her forehead. "It's his home just the same. It ought to have been left to him."

Allan got up, propping the drawing-board against the table, and stood off to look at it. His wife moved round to his side, looking too, but mechanically; her thoughts were still on the trail of the outcast Mitchell. Allan put his arm round her, shifting the paint-box to his right hand.

"I am afraid, fair champion of the oppressed, that your sense of equity is distinctly rocky. In a court of law——"

"What do I care about stuffy law!"

He picked out a brush, and attacked a final high light. "Of course you don't!" he returned admiringly. "No woman ever did. There's where you have the advantage."

Somehow the story of Jethro Mitchell and his grandfather seemed to cling oddly to Mrs. Allan's mind. It recurred to her persistently during the days that followed; she could not rid herself of it. Perhaps the atmosphere of the old house itself affected her thoughts subconsciously, the walls and furniture that had known so many years of intimate human companionship, the rooms that had watched the younger Jethro grow from boyhood to youth; that seemed jealously, in dignified reserve, to guard their hoarded memories.

Her mind filled in, intuitively, much that the post-mistress's narrative left blank. She saw a small lonely boy, kneeling down morning and evening to family prayers, with his grandfather and the old deaf servant, made to listen to long Bible chapters, while his gaze wandered furtively out of window to the wide summer sea, and the village street, where other children played; a little boy who made friends for sheer loneliness with the cat and the sparrows, who night after night, when he first came to the dark uncheerful house, sobbed himself to sleep, starting at a fancied footstep, shivering at the creak of the wainscot. She saw him sitting beside his grandfather, twice every Sunday, in the front pew of the chapel, listening wide-eyed to a young preacher who told him, over and over again, that he was damned, that everyone was damned, and he thinking guiltily all the while of the biscuit filched from the side-board cupboard while the servant was laying the table for tea. She thought of him hemmed in by this iron doctrine of fire and punishment, seeing the world the minister spoke of as a narrow slippery footpath with hell yawning on either side, and hell waiting for you unescapably, turn which way you would, when you got to the end.

Many an evening, putting Bodey to bed, she stayed with him a moment longer, tucked him in with a more lingering touch, for the sake of that small unknown boy of forty years ago.

She liked to think that the old house came, in time, to have a

certain friendship for him, a protective kindness. She could even fancy the furniture relaxing a little, for him, its stiffness, smiling at him sometimes as the furniture smiled at the little boy in Hans Andersen's story. And following out this fancy, it seemed to her that years later the house must have felt the hurt as much as the old man did, when the boards of its stairway first creaked to a stumbling tread at midnight.

Her mind dwelling so much on the people who used to live here, she came by degrees to have a curious conviction of their presence, to-day, in the house which had known them in life. It was the sense in which every old house retains in greater or less degree the spirit of its former tenants, so long as stone remains on stone. If it stands empty for thirty years one is conscious still, on entering, of its occupation.

This vague consciousness, which she put down at first to the mere effect of environment, developed, as the days went by, into an active influence. She became so acutely alive to it as sometimes, suddenly entering an empty room, to feel a sense of unwarranted intrusion. For a long time she fought against it, strove with it, succeeded, sometimes, in dismissing it for days together from her mind; but always in the end it came back; in the creak of the flooring, the stirring of a door in the dusk. And gradually this feeling, conviction, call it what you will, came to assume for her a significance, a persistency; it was like a wistful, voiceless message. She puzzled over it, brooded upon it, tried by a hundred ways to read its meaning.

And then one afternoon, as she sat with her sewing in the cheerful sunlit sitting-room, the truth came to her, in a perfectly simple commonplace way.

"They would rather we weren't here; they don't like the house being let; they want us to go."

V.

To be turned out of a house—an ordinary furnished house, with horsehair chairs in it, that they had rented on a three months' agreement—by the people who had lived and died there forty years before! It was absurd, yet that, if Mrs. Allan accepted the solution, was what it amounted to. And she had to accept it; it was forced upon her with uncompromising directness. It was no longer the house that didn't want them, that resented their continued presence; it was the Mitchells. But she wouldn't give in; she was not going to give in. It was absurd. She even resented the way in which these accumulated generations of Mitchells seemed

to have taken her sympathy for granted, to count upon her; to appeal to her to help them in their scheme. They seemed to assume that having interpreted the hint she was going to act upon it, to do her best to talk her husband over, and induce him to join her in packing up their belongings and leaving the house to its real owners. It was as plain as if the very furniture should say to her: "We like you; we have nothing against you personally. We regret having to inconvenience you. Still, there are other houses in Rennuthnoe, and we would thank you very kindly to leave us ours to ourselves." They would even, she felt, waive the question of rent, pay willingly, out of nearly empty pockets, for the right of privacy; but here fortunately was where, as Allan would have said, the nephew in Penzance came in. The nephew in Penzance, whose name was Jennings, was a factor to be reckoned with. He was not likely to give in to any whim of departed relatives.

She did feel for them; she couldn't help it. They were so pathetically helpless, when it came to the point; they could really do nothing. It was this wistful helplessness that appealed to her. It must be dreadful, she thought, to know that one could do nothing, say nothing, make no direct appeal; to know oneself as impotent and unconsidered as the breath of summer air that stirs the window curtains. She felt that in their silent way they were trying to make a friend of her, to get her to help them. And she wasn't going to do it.

She told herself that she was developing nerves. She took determinedly to a more outdoor life, to going for long walks with her husband. He had finished the last of the set of illustrations he was working upon, and was doing, just now, a great deal of sketching. Every morning after breakfast he took his easel and strapped paint-box and disappeared for long forenoons, along the shore or across the burrows. Usually he told her which way he was going, and she would set out about eleven, with Rodey and the lunch-basket to join him, and they would eat their midday meal in the open air. Often they took bathing suits and towels and bathed from the rocks along the shore, in still green water warm from the noon sun. Dane was a good swimmer, and was teaching his wife. She did not make very great progress, as yet. She liked best to stay with Rodey in the shallows, and watch Allan while he swam far out, only the regular rise and flash of his arm visible at times above the shining surface of the water.

He was doing good work, and she was proudly glad of it. She sat and watched him as he stood before his easel, in a sun-faded shirt and disgraceful trousers, his lips pursed to a

silent whistle, his forehead drawn into fine concentrated lines of intentness.

"Dane," she said one day, "do I bother you, being here?"

"What?" he asked absently.

He went on placing small touches of colour, glancing from foreground to canvas and back again. Presently he laid down his palette and picked up Rodey, who had been engaged in repeatedly burying a small beetle under the dry sand, to see it struggle out again.

"Roderic," he said, "remember that when you grow to be a big wise man and your ears stick out, you may profitably set your mind on becoming Pope or railway director or King of England, but don't try to paint sandhill grass with the wind on it. I have spoken!"

She told herself that she kept out of doors so much for the sake of the fresh air and the exercise. But she knew that three-quarters of her reason was to escape temporarily the wistful haunting appeal that dogged her now from room to room when she was in the house. It was her welcome when she got home; it met her on the door-step, it followed her out into the high-walled garden. She kept thinking of it in spite of herself.

"We would rather you weren't here; we don't like the house being let; we want you to go away."

Of course it was absurd, but the absurdity did not make it any better. The thing began to get on her nerves. She began to wonder if she was out of health, morbidly imaginative. But she had never felt physically better in her life. She walked well, ate well, slept well. Sometimes she thought she would tell Dane about it. But how could she—what could she say? Simply that the atmosphere of the house affected her; that she had unaccountable fancies; that she had suddenly discovered she could not stay in it. How could she make what was so plain to herself plain to him. It was all so vague. Sitting in the lamp-lit room while he talked and laughed and smoked pipes after Rodey was gone to bed, she tried sometimes to imagine herself putting the matter to him on the only ground that she could; telling him that certain people, dead and buried half a century, objected to their continued residence in the house, wanted them, in short, to pack their things and leave it. The bare idea was ridiculous, the reality, when one knew Dane, impossible. He was the dearest man in the world, but she recognised now, in a way she had never done before, limitations in his character which would render any appeal to him, other than on strictly practical and commonsense grounds, completely useless.

He believed only in what he could see with his eyes, touch with his hands. For him an iron curtain divided real from unreal, flesh from spirit. When a man died he died, and there was an end of it in so far at least as those he left behind him were concerned. He was of a living breathing world that took no heed to other than material influences, material reasoning. His healthy laugh, his way of moving, of standing, the very clothes he wore, gave one the impression of outdoor strength and sanity, of English level-headedness. She could never make him see the matter as she saw it, feel what she felt.

Sometimes she wondered whether he did know, did feel. It seemed impossible that he should not be in some degree aware of what she felt so acutely. She watched him as he moved about the rooms, or sat and read of an evening, with a furtive scrutiny. Once he looked up and caught her eyes fixed upon him.

"What's the matter?" he asked instantly.

"Nothing."

It was no use trying to tell him. He bent over his book again, his brown roughened head held between his hands. The sight of Allan reading always suggested a physical wrestle. He read very slowly, and when he once began a book hated to put it down. He would carry it about with him and read doggedly, deaf to interruption, until he had finished it.

They had been seven weeks in the house when one day, feeling for a tradesman's bill that had slipped down behind the heavy chiffonier in the dining-room, her hand touched a stiff piece of card, and she drew it out. It was a photograph, a faded carte-de-visite in the style of twenty years ago, that had evidently been kept in one of the drawers, and had worked its way out at the back and fallen, caught between the woodwork and the wall.

It represented a young man in a fisherman's jersey, the collar rolled a little back from his throat. In spite of the stiffness of the local photographer's ideal, there was something pleasant in the eyes, the square chin, the boyish curve of the mouth. It was not a strong face, there was something wanting in it; perhaps the mouth should have been a little straighter, the eyes more frank. She set the picture on the mantelpiece, and when her husband came in she showed it to him.

"Who is it?" he asked. "Where did you find it?"

"Back of the sideboard. It's Jethro Mitchell."

He propped the photograph on the mantelpiece again, and stood looking at it.

"So that's the youth who set Rennuthnoe by the ears. Well, he doesn't impress one very much, does he?"

She looked over his shoulder.

"Oh, I think he has a nice face, Dane!"

"He had a nice character, by all accounts."

"Fancy its turning up after all these years," she said. "I suppose his grandfather kept it. I'm glad he did."

A new idea struck Allan.

"Possibly it's the picture of the grandfather. It might be—just as easily." He laughed at her face of indignation. "Well, I'm going up to get clean. Has the Jaeger so far taken you into her confidence as to tell you what time she's going to give us supper to-night?"

"In about half an hour."

He went off, whistling, and she heard him going up the uncarpeted staircase two steps at a time. She stood a little longer after he had gone, looking at the picture of Jethro Mitchell. The young eyes of the photograph seemed to face her with a curious significant friendliness, almost a confidence. It was as if they said: "You're with us, aren't you? You know you're with us—you can't help it. You're on our side."

She remembered how the post-mistress had said: "Everyone liked Jethro. He had the way with him; you couldn't help yourself." She turned away, but when she got to the door she looked back, and across the length of the room the eyes still followed her, reminded her, "You're with us; you know you are—you can't help it."

VI.

THERE were two men who came through Rennuthnoe with a donkey-cart several times a week, in the early morning, selling pilchards. They pitched their cry in different keys, and each cry expressed, above all else, a lofty and rigid contempt for the other vendor. One man made his announcement in a bored, indifferent voice, that gave a proper value and dignity to the word; the other began in a loud high key like some joyous war-cry, and went on rapidly as long as his breath held out, the first vigour of his voice diminishing gradually to an exhausted buzz, suggestive of clock-work run down, when his pause for breath was succeeded by a burst of fresh power and energy. The dignified man chanted rhythmically "*Pil—chards! Pil—chards!*" He had space usually to get the word out three times before the cheerful man, having filled his lungs again to their utmost, broke in with his glad warwhoop: "*Pilchards, pilchards, pilch'ds, p'ch's, p'ch's, poh-ch-ch-zz-z——*" When these two men of

business encountered each other face to face it was worth going to an upper window to watch the way in which the donkey-carts passed in the narrow street.

The Allans ate pilchards every morning for breakfast as a sort of local religious rite. They liked them the first week, tolerated them the second, hated them for ever after. This made no difference to the Jaeger, as Dane irreverently called her, who ruled them absolutely in the matter of household economy. They learned at an early date to eat meekly what she gave them. Once in a while she gave them eggs, as a concession, and on Sundays they had bacon, but as a general rule it was pilchards and fried toast, varied by fried toast and pilchards. She made a great ceremony of coming into the room immediately after breakfast to consult with Mrs. Allan about dinner, but the consultation was a mere hollow show. She always got what she thought they ought to have.

The Jaeger was nevertheless a real comfort to Mrs. Allan. She was solid and practical and reliable; it was as good as having a policeman in the house. Rodey adored her. He was scarcely to be torn from her company, and spent long hours in the kitchen. She told him Bible stories over the peeling of potatoes, and brought him a yellow kitten from the village to play with. Yellow cats were a speciality of Rennuthnoe. The Jaeger's own diet was the only thing that troubled Mrs. Allan, until she learned to let her alone. She never touched meat nor cheese nor "messes"—in which she included vegetables and stewed fruit—and appeared to subsist chiefly on pasties, fried potatoes and tea; she always had a brown earthenware teapot stewing somewhere at the back of the stove. Mrs. Allan strongly suspected that she put gin in the tea at least three times a day, and Dane's whiskey evaporated with curious irregularity after the first week or so. But she scorned any offer of beer, and no one ever saw her drunk.

Allan said: "If she can stand the kind of whiskey one gets down here she deserves to have it. I can't."

Meantime, the photograph of Jethro Mitchell stayed on the dining-room mantelpiece. Allan had forgotten all about it, but his wife hadn't. Often she glanced at it in passing, met by chance the eyes watching her about the room. Always they said: "You're with us, aren't you? You're on our side."

She was. She knew that she couldn't help it, that they had won her over by their wistful persistence. And with this knowledge it seemed to her that the meaning of their silent communication with her changed. She was not sure after all that they did want them to go, that they had not come by degrees to

be satisfied with their staying. Sometimes she thought that it was friendship they wanted, the knowledge that someone understood. They even liked her, she felt; were glad of her tacit sympathy. On that basis, if they were willing, she determined gratefully to let the matter rest.

But they were not willing; they were not going to let her be. Coming one afternoon into the dining-room to fetch a magazine, she saw a man standing by the window, looking out. His back was toward her, but by his build she judged him to be some thirty-five or forty years of age. He gave one somehow the impression of being at home in the room. He did not turn at the sound of her arrested footstep, but moved away from the window leisurely, a second later, and walked through into the kitchen. She did not see his face.

For a moment her fingers gripped the woodwork of the doorway against which she was leaning. Then she stepped down into the room and crossed it to the door through which he had passed. The dining-room communicated with the kitchen by a little entry, with a china closet at one side. She touched the closet door as she passed. It was locked, with the key on the outside. She went through into the kitchen.

Mrs. Jago was sitting by the open door which led into the yard, peeling apples into a big brown bowl. On the floor, Rodey, in his tumbled holland overall, was playing with the yellow kitten. There was no one else in the room, which was filled with the cheerful afternoon sunshine. Her gaze swept every inch of it as she came to a baffled pause in the middle of the floor. Mrs. Jago brought her to her senses, looking up smilingly from her apple-paring.

"Why, Mrs. Allan," she cheerfully exclaimed, "you do look as if you'd seen a ghost!"

VII.

SHE went upstairs, on an impulse that she could not define, and locked herself into her room and sat down on the bed.

They were in the twentieth century—the twentieth century. She insisted upon it to herself, over and over again. Such things didn't happen nowadays; they couldn't happen. It was impossible. They only happened in Christmas annuals—old Christmas annuals with holly on the cover. She was living in the twentieth century, in England, in a respectable middle-class furnished house, rented from a man named Jennings. She said it over slowly, as if she were trying to drive each word into her brain like a nail, and clinch it there.

Then all at once a fit of shuddering came over her, a reaction from the strain that was past. It was only by a strong mental effort that she kept from throwing herself face-downward on the bed and sobbing. Her fingers gripped tightly on something that she was holding, and looking down she saw that it was the magazine which she had picked up, without knowing that she did so, in the dining-room as she came through. It was the *Strand* summer number, and somehow the very feel of it, the sight of the familiar pale blue cover, so emphatically of to-day, gave her a sense of comfort. She sat there holding it in an absurd clutching way on her knee, the other hand pressed to her forehead, trying to think collectedly, to convince herself.

The sunlight came in through the short muslin blinds at the window, and touched the washstand, Rodey's brass-knobbed cot in the corner, the white honeycomb quilt on which she was sitting. Outside in the street an itinerant greengrocer was crying apples. She went back to the first moment when she had paused in the doorway, had caught sight of the figure at the window. She tried to recall his exact appearance, and found oddly, though it was barely ten minutes ago, that she could not. She only knew that she had seen him, had noticed vividly at the time every detail of his appearance. She wondered why she had not been frightened. She had always imagined that when people saw apparitions they were able to recognise them as such. There would be something different about them, some sense of barrier. But nothing had warned her, nothing had told her. Her only feeling, until she came upstairs, had been of curiosity and bewilderment. The more she thought of it the more inexplicable it seemed.

She was roused by hearing Dane's footstep on the stairs, and her pulse jumped hysterically. Not until he tried the door-handle and hammered on the panels did she realise that she had locked the door. She rose then and let him in.

He looked hot and tired. He had had a long tramp home across the burrows.

"What on earth," he began as he came into the room, "did you want to lock the door for?"

"I didn't know I had locked it. I'm sorry."

He looked at her quickly.

"Have you been crying?"

"No. Why?"

"You have been crying!"

"I haven't! How can you be so absurd, Dane!"

She felt irritated; her nerves were on the stretch. Yet mingled with the feeling was an unreasonable joy at his return,

at the familiar sight of him, with his sun-tanned face, and square shoulders and home-like shabby painting clothes. She caught sight of her own face in the glass. It looked unnaturally white and strained; she had not dreamed that she looked like that. She turned on a swift impulse and caught hold of him, burying her face against his old coat that smelled of turpentine.

"Dane, I'm glad you're back!"

"Why? My dear girl, what's the matter?"

"Nothing—nothing. Only I missed you; I wanted you back."

"Well, you silly little donkey, why didn't you come? You might just as well. I asked you to."

"Yes, I know. Oh, Dane, you do smell of turpentine! Go and wash."

He looked at her again as he left the room.

"You're sure you weren't crying?"

"Don't be a lunatic. Do I ever cry? Hurry, boy, or you'll be late for tea."

She tidied her hair, standing before the glass. Downstairs, presently, she could hear Dane romping with Rodey in the dining-room. The child's laugh echoed cheerfully through the house. She sat down on the edge of the bed again to think.

She could not tell him; if she had ever had a doubt it vanished now definitely. This latest development had made it impossible. The only thing she dreaded, now, was the possibility of her not needing to tell him, of his finding it out for himself. She remembered the weeks before he left the town—the nervous depression of which the sea and the open air had only just cured him. Any worry now would undo all the good that the summer was doing him, throw him back to where he was before. She would have to keep it from him at any cost, face it out by herself. And she could put up with it; could nerve herself deliberately to stand the strain for five weeks more. There were only five weeks, and then they need never see Rennuthnoe again. After all, there was nothing to be afraid of, absolutely nothing. But she dared not let herself think of the relief it would be when they were out of the house; in anticipation she saw those five weeks like five centuries, cycles of eternity.

There was nothing to be afraid of. They were living in the twentieth century. And then a latent sense of humour in the situation struck her and she laughed a little, hysterically, pulling herself up by sheer force of will. Mrs. Jago's words came to her mind.

"He was a Rennuthnoe man, and he belonged to come back to Rennuthnoe."

VIII.

JETHRO MITCHELL—if it was Jethro—kept out of Mrs. Allan's way for nearly a week, until she began to believe herself fairly safe, to regard the occurrence even as a trick of over-strained nerves; then she saw him again. It was in the back entry, and she followed him out into the garden, where she abruptly lost him. If she felt anything at all this time it was merely irritation, a determination to follow him, to compel him to take notice of her. But she gathered, from the quickening of his pace, that it was just this which he wished to escape. He had his reasons, and he looked to her to respect them. She recognised his wish, gave in to it, as she felt that he had trusted she would; and after that she saw him often, sometimes two or three times a week, but always rather as if by chance, and never with the clearness of their first encounter. She fancied, trying to follow out his plan of action, that he had let himself be seen, then, purposely, but that to these subsequent glimpses she caught of him he was indifferent. Sometimes it was not even a glimpse; she had merely, without looking up, the sense of his passing presence.

For a long while she thought that he made himself known to her, in his silent way, only when she was alone; that he shunned any other companionship even more than he shunned hers. But one evening, sitting with Dane after the supper was cleared away, she felt conscious of his presence. She looked up at her husband.

It seemed to her that he must notice, must feel. It was obvious to her as though someone had just walked across the floor with heavy boots. But Dane went on reading, obliviously. She rose, rather unsteadily, and went round the table and laid her hands on his shoulders.

"What are you reading, Dane?" she asked lightly.

She was sorry the next moment for having spoken. He shut the magazine with a snap and pushed it away from him, smiling.

"Oh, a rotten thing—about a ghost."

She laughed.

"You don't believe in ghosts, do you?"

"Believe in them! Do you?"

"No. Of course I don't. They make thrilling stories."

"Depends on what you call thrilling." He pulled out his tobacco pouch and started to roll a cigarette. "It seems to me that when a chap hasn't got enough brains to write a good yarn about real things, he goes and sticks some kind of a nondescript spook in to pull the interest up. You never catch a man writing

ghost stories that can write other stories. And you notice you never meet anyone who really saw a ghost, themselves. They know someone who did, or they've heard of something, but they've never seen it themselves. You can floor them on that point every time."

"Yes"—she went back to her place again and sat with her chin on her hands, staring at the tablecloth—"that's pretty true."

"What people call ghosts," Allan went on, in the intervals of trying to make his cigarette draw, "are nothing but mental projections brought about by an over-excited imagination. If you get to thinking of a thing long enough you're pretty sure to see it." He was too occupied with his cigarette to notice her involuntary start. "Those who think swallows see swallows—that's the whole idea."

"Then you do believe in mental projections?"

"When anyone's mentally or physically out of health. There's another name for them, too."

She smiled, but rather absently, and he said: "Well?"

"I was just wondering," she returned, "whether it wouldn't be just as uncomfortable to live in a house with a mental projection as with a ghost."

He drew the magazine towards him again, and began to ruffle the advertisement pages through.

"Don't you think, Dane," she said presently, watching him, "supposing you cared for a place very much—wouldn't you want to come back to it, after you were dead?"

"I might *want*."

"But supposing force of association drew you—that you couldn't help yourself?"

(*To be continued.*)

The Last Mitchell.

IX.

ONE morning when Mrs. Allan came in from her marketing she said :

"There are five cases of typhoid in the village and the doctor's calling it scarlatina."

"Who told you?"

"The post-mistress. Her nephew has it."

Allan spoke with a paint-brush between his teeth.

"That's the beauty of these little peaceful country villages! Remember when Dicky Mills spent a summer in Scotland? The whole water-supply in the place where he was came from a picturesque little brook that drained down the hill right through the churchyard. As soon as he found it out he got blood-poisoning. It had never hurt anyone else in the village, because they all drank whiskey. There are two morals to that tale."

His wife was taking off her hat with a kind of resigned despair. She stuck the pins through the crown of it, and sat down on the sofa.

"It is hot out this morning! I don't think we ought to let Rodey go down into the village. We can keep him up at this end when he goes for walks. All the cases are down towards the station, and we're on higher ground here. Dane, I want you to go down to-day and find out where Tredwin grazes his cows, and whether there isn't another milkman in Rennuthnoe."

"All right," said Allan.

She knew that he would go, for all his nonchalance. He was just as fidgety about Rodey, when it came to the point, as she was. He strapped his easel and paint-box on to his bicycle that afternoon, and went out sketching. When he got back in the evening he said :

"Oh, I've seen a farmer out Trescoe way, and he's going to send a boy in with milk every morning. So we needn't have any more from Tredwin."

The Trescoe farmer was as good as his word, and a small youth arrived every morning on a decrepit bicycle, with a covered milk-can slung from the handlebars. Nevertheless she worried a good deal, even then, to herself, and was ready instantly to see the finger of relentless fate when Rodey, some few mornings later, woke up flushed and fretful, wouldn't eat his breakfast, and spent the morning on the sitting-room floor playing listlessly with Obadiah, the yellow kitten. The Jaeger talked wisely of syrup of rhubarb, but Dane rode down to the village, just before tea, and fetched the doctor back with him.

He was a middle-aged man with black whiskers, and a big voice pitched in a key of cheerful brusqueness. He looked at Rodey, talked about the weather and the bathing and the projected extension of the railway to Trescoe; and wrote a prescription, standing up with a preoccupied air at the table. When he had finished he thought a moment, and then wrote a second. He folded that up, drawing it between his fingers, and turned to Allan.

"I suppose you find a lot to paint round here?"

"Any amount! It's nice country."

"Yes. We used to get a good many artists down here some years back. Go out sketching a good deal, do you?"

"Nearly every day."

"I see." He dipped his thermometer into the tumbler of water Mrs. Allan had brought him, and shook it absent-mindedly on the carpet while he talked. "Stand about in the sun a good deal, I suppose—then go in bathing to get cool?"

Dane laughed. "Yes—I suppose I do, quite a good bit."

"Had any cough lately?"

"I? I don't think so."

"No?" He gave the thermometer a final shake. "Will you just hold that under your tongue a moment, Mr. Allan—thank you!"

Allan tried to speak, but was peremptorily waved down, and he had to stand sucking the little glass tube in absurdly resentful helplessness, while the doctor resumed his conversation with Mrs. Allan on the natural beauties of Rennuthnoe. She answered him at random, staring at Dane with a sudden hollow tightness at her throat. He had looked over-tired lately; she remembered guiltily how she had noticed it that afternoon, when he had come in from his work and gone straight off for the doctor without waiting for tea. His face looked white and thin under the sun-burn, his eyes restless. She had put it down to worry about Rodey. She caught his gaze now and he smiled at her

whimsically behind the doctor's back, as well as he could with his lips closed obediently on the thermometer.

The doctor took it from him in his abrupt, preoccupied way, barely glancing at it as he slipped it back into his pocket.

"Just take my advice, Mr. Allan—give up this painting business for a few days. Nice pleasant room here. You sit in it and read, or worry your wife, or do anything you like. Be careful what you eat. There's no reason really why you should eat anything at all. This second prescription is for you. You can get them both made up at Bryant's; he's the best chemist in the village—gets fresh drugs at least once in three years!"

Mrs. Allan followed him to the door when he left.

"Isn't there a good deal of typhoid in the village just now?" she asked.

"Typhoid? No, I shouldn't say so. I shouldn't say so. There is an epidemic, certainly, of a nature which usually assails the youth of Rennuthnoe about this time of year—just before the blackberries get properly ripe. Get your milk from Tredwin, do you?"

"We have. We are getting it from a farm outside Rennuthnoe now."

"That's right. You can't do better. You might boil it all, just for the present. There's nothing the matter with that young scamp of yours. He'll be all right to-morrow." He settled her bewildered doubt as to whether he was referring to Dane by adding: "Keep your husband quiet for a few days, Mrs. Allan. I'll look in to-morrow. You can do it, I suppose?"

She returned his half-quizzical smile.

"I can try."

"That's right. And you needn't worry."

"No, I won't."

He peered at her shrewdly as he turned to go.

"You look to me," he said, "as if you were given to worrying a good deal."

She went back to the room where Dane was moving restlessly about, with his hands in his pockets.

"That man's mad," he growled. "There's nothing the matter with me. I've only got a headache." He lounged to the table and picked up the prescription. "Nux vomica—what's the rest of it? I suppose I'd better take these round to be made up. I wish I'd thought to tell him I'd been living on pilchards for the last year or so. What did he say—besides telling you that Rennuthnoe was very pretty?"

She laughed.

"That the village boys were suffering from a surfeit of unripe blackberries, and that we'd better boil the milk. I'll take those down, Dane. You stay here."

"What. No, you won't!" He thrust the prescriptions into his pocket and picked up his cap from the sofa. "I'm going on my bicycle. I want some more tobacco."

As he went out of the door he said :

"I'll be hanged if I drink boiled milk for anybody !"

X.

It was not such an easy job to keep Allan quiet as the doctor had assumed. He was just ill enough for the next few days to be thoroughly irritable. He grumbled about the doctor, the drains, the gramophone in the public-house three doors up the street, the Jaeger's hymn-singing and the editorial mismanagement of certain London magazines. He grumbled at his wife when she was in the room, and worried like a child when she was out of it. He seemed to give way all at once ; and with her own nerves already stretched to a little more, it seemed, than she could stand, she saw before her sometimes a repetition of the weeks which had preceded their departure from town, and wondered hopelessly how she was going through with it.

To amuse a half-sick Englishman in his own castle demands more finesse and personal resource than would be required to run successfully three music-halls and a woman's club. She scoured the only circulating library in Rennuthnoe till she found a volume of Stevenson, and read aloud to Dane as he lay on the sofa and smoked—she couldn't make him go to bed—and her only respite was when the doctor came in once a day and gave him temporarily something new to growl at.

With Dane ill on her hands she found less time to think about the Mitchells. The real worry drove the vague one from her mind. He had only just escaped typhoid—the doctor admitted as much grudgingly on his third visit—and in her relief that he had missed it, nothing else seemed to matter. Only as he got better did she realise fully what they had so narrowly escaped. Everything, it seemed to her in the first glad sense of safety. Later, she modified her gratitude.

One afternoon when she came into the sitting-room Allan said : "Who was it that just went round to the front door?"

He was sitting near the window, making a pencil-sketch for the first of a new set of drawings. The sitting-room was on the side

of the house against the street, its two windows overlooking the front garden. Any one had to pass them to reach the house door. There was no way out of the garden except by the little front gate in the wall, where the old-fashioned bell-pull was.

She went to the window, pulling the curtain aside. Garden and doorstep were empty,

"Why, no one, Dane! I didn't see anybody."

"I made sure I saw a man. I didn't look up."

Her hand went out involuntarily and touched the window-ledge, clinging to it. She knew her face had whitened, she felt it—knew that he had noticed it, even before he exclaimed:

"Well, heavens, you needn't look like that, if it was! What's the matter?"

"Nothing! Did I look as if there was?"

"You are queer nowadays," he grumbled. "You jump if a door slams. If anyone did get into the house it would more likely be a bailiff than a burglar." He indicated a fold of drapery with two quick nervous strokes of the pencil, screwing up his eyes. "Joe Ivey says there's nothing worth stealing in Rennuthnoe. He says if anyone broke into a house here all they'd get would be a bunch of candles—twelve to the pound—and they wouldn't find that here. Is tea ready?"

"I'll go and see."

She almost fled from the room. But she did not go at once to the kitchen. Instead she sat down on the lower step of the staircase, holding her head in her hand, and tried to think.

If Dane knew, if he should get to know. A sudden dread clutched at her heart, a dread which she knew now had been there all the time, though his words had only just given it definiteness. After all, why should she have taken it so for granted that he wouldn't; have let herself feel so secure! If the Mitchells chose deliberately to involve him, to drag him into it, how could she, single-handed, play the game out against them, even though the stake were her husband's health? It seemed to her that her anxiety was defeating, on their side, its own ends, helping to bring about the one thing now that was left to avoid; the state of her own nerves reacting upon his. Her head throbbed; she was a quiver of wrenched nerves from head to foot. She set her teeth. She wouldn't give in; she would fight it out inch by inch. There were only three weeks more. Dane shouldn't know; he shouldn't.

She began to plan mechanically. He had been in the house too much lately; it was beginning to act upon him as it had acted upon her. His nerves were out of order. She must get him out

again; get him to take drives, excursions. There were a dozen outdoor things they had planned to do; a day's pollack-fishing, a picnic to Gunwallow, a drive to the Land's End on the brake which passed twice a week through Rennuthnoe—with the summer so nearly gone there would be good excuse for crowding everything into the last few weeks. His nerves would get back their tone in the open air. After all she might be upsetting herself unnecessarily; she hoped to heaven she was. It might have been merely a trick of the eyesight, a fancy that might easily have happened to him anywhere. She admitted that she was ready to exaggerate possibilities, to attribute everything instinctively to the one cause. She must be perfectly clear-headed. She would wait and see.

She had not long, as it happened, to wait. A few days later she was in the kitchen with Rodey, getting tea; Mrs Jago had gone to visit a married sister at Trescoe. She was standing at the table, cutting bread-and-butter while she waited for the kettle to boil, when she felt rather than saw the figure of Jethro Mitchell cross the room leisurely from the entry and go out through the open door into the back yard. The instinctive shock of his presence, which she had never yet grown used to, startled her so that her hand shook, and the knife she was holding slipped and grazed her knuckle. She pressed the cut and a little scarlet thread of blood came to the surface. She was looking at it when she heard Dane's step on the threshold. She had left him in the front garden reading. He walked straight into the room and she pulled herself together as he came to a pause in the middle of the floor.

"Who was it that just went out?"

It seemed to her an endless moment before she answered; time enough for her to go deliberately over the whole ground and make up her mind. She knew the position of the kitchen from the hall; knew that a full two seconds had passed before he came in. He could not have had more than a fleeting glimpse, if he had had that.

"Why, no one, Dane!" she said.

The instant the words were out of her mouth she knew that they were wrong—hopelessly wrong. But she had taken her ground and she had to stick to it. Dane simply looked at her.

"My dear girl, why don't you tell me I'm drunk? I *saw* him."

"So you said the other day, and it wasn't anything. If you're going to take to seeing strange men in every odd corner round the house," she smiled, "you'd better get the doctor to change your tonic!"

He lounged over to the table, and leaned back against the edge

of it, his hands in his pockets. His gaze fell upon the finger which she had raised mechanically to her mouth.

"What have you done to your hand?"

"Only cut it a little."

"How?"

"The knife slipped. I suppose I wasn't looking at what I was doing." She answered indifferently, twisting her handkerchief round the cut, and went on with her bread cutting.

"I see."

Something in his tone made her face flush swiftly.

"Dane, what on earth is the matter with *you*?"

"I beg your pardon. I didn't know there was anything the matter with me." He touched the edge of a plate that was on the table near him, tilting it round. "I merely object to being told lies, if that's what you mean."

"I told you the truth."

"Oh, very well! Look, the kettle's boiling."

"I suppose you don't believe me."

"My dear girl, is it anything to make a fuss about? If you say so you say so—that's enough."

He got off the table and moved to the door again. "Is there anything you want me to carry in?"

"Dane—stop! I asked you a question. Do you believe me?"

"What?" He looked at her oddly. "Very well, then, if you want to know, I don't! However, there's a very simple way of settling the matter for both of us. Rodey!"

Involuntarily she took a step forward. It was on her lips to cry out: "For God's sake, don't drag the child into it!" Knowing what she did, it seemed to her too horrible. But she was helpless. She had chosen and she must go through with it. She had Dane to think of, and Dane only. After all, Rodey was a baby; he could have seen nothing. Her hand went down and closed on a fold of her skirt, till she felt the nails press through the fabric into her palm.

"Rodey," he said easily, "who went through the kitchen just now?"

Rodey released his hold of the yellow kitten, and it walked a few paces off and sat down, tucking its paws under it. He wriggled after it across the tiled floor. "Man," he breathed, without looking up.

She bit her lip. So it had come to this, after all. Rodey was intent on recapturing the kitten. Dane smiled.

"What sort of man, kiddie?"

"Dane! That's enough—don't!"

The words broke from her almost hysterically. He laughed, straightening his shoulders, and walked away from her towards the door.

"I suppose you'll hardly tell me," he flung back, "that the child is lying!"

XI.

THE record of their excursions that summer seemed, looking back afterward, to be largely a record of teas. They got into the way of associating certain places of interest with the teas they had there. Some places achieved prominence in their memory solely on account of the tea, as the cove with the unpronounceable name from whence they had planned to walk along the cliffs to the Logan rock, but were dissuaded by an old man, who represented the distance to be five miles as the crow flies, over bad ground—he was sure the dear lady could never do it—and they had better abandon the idea and have tea with him, at a shilling a head, cream included. It transpired, after wasting half an hour on a particularly uninteresting stretch of beach, that there was no cream to be had that day; the only cake on the table had been made with bad eggs, and they learned later that they could have walked to the Logan easily in forty minutes, with a good coast-guard path all the way.

Their various excursions filled the time pleasantly enough during which the doctor had peremptorily forbidden Dane to work. He fidgeted under the order, but gave in to it, so far as to work only three hours out of the day. The only effect now which the week's illness had left with him was in a certain restlessness, a nervous irritability, which showed itself even through his moods of gaiety. He found fault with trifles, worried about little things, seemed to develop in new directions that obstinacy latent in all good-humoured people. Sometimes it seemed to his wife that it had taken this summer to teach her how irritating Dane could be when he chose. And it seemed to her, too, morbidly, that the influence of this house, which she had come now to hate the very walls of, was reacting malignantly upon them both, coming between them, throwing fateful lights on each other's characters, fostering the worst in them.

Realising how different Dane was nowadays, how he said things, did things he would never have said or done six months ago, things absolutely foreign to his nature, she found herself wondering whether he saw the same difference in her; whether she herself was changed. She set herself determinedly to strive

against the thought, but sometimes, alone in the house, or lying awake at night listening to Dane's untroubled breathing, it gripped her till she could have cried out aloud. She seemed then to feel the influence of the place as sinister, evil. It was a natural exaggeration, in the state to which her nerves had become gradually keyed.

Dane never referred again to their quarrel in the kitchen. But the recollection of it was between them still. It remained a conscious barrier, a gap in their relationship, patch and gloss it as they would. Dane was essentially straightforward; he would forgive anything sooner than equivocation. Though he treated her as usual, she felt the difference keenly in the way he spoke, the way he looked. And the worst was that she knew it had not ended there, that it was only a beginning. She felt the strain of an impending trouble that sooner or later would come to a crisis.

If Dane ever encountered Jethro Mitchell again he said nothing of it to his wife. And, though she dreaded his doing so every hour of the day, she came to feel a certain relief on this point. If he had not seen him again it seemed to show that ill-health had made him temporarily sensitive; that under normal physical conditions he would see or feel nothing. It lessened her dread in one direction.

But that afternoon had given her another fear. She had too much common sense to question Rodey, but she would have given a great deal to know what he had really seen. Sometimes she put his answer down to mere irresponsible childish perversity, the unaccountable instinct to say just what came into his head. It was natural to children. He couldn't possibly have known what he was saying; he was only a baby still. It was absurd to talk of truth or untruth with regard to a child of three; at any other time Dane himself would have known better than to question him, certainly than to accept his answer as in any sense conclusive. Yet she had to reckon with the hundredth chance that it might have been accurate; she dared not take for granted that it was not. With this chance in her mind she would have felt herself criminal in exposing him to any risk of nervous shock. He was a solid enough little Briton to all appearances, but she knew that the nervous organisation of even an unintelligent child—and Rodey was not that—is a machine too delicate to play tricks with. It was a point upon which she had always felt very strongly, as her father had. He was a man from whom nothing was further than any belief in the supernatural, as commonly understood, but she remembered very clearly his anger—and he was not easily given to anger—on learning that she herself, then

a child of seven, had, on a visit to some friends, been put to sleep in a small ante-room which had a vague reputation of being "haunted." To do the hostess justice, she entirely disbelieved the rumour, and had probably not even given the matter a thought. But one of Mrs. Allan's clearest recollections was of the sternness in her father's eyes when he said: "It makes no difference whether they believed in it or not. No one has the right to expose a child to any risk of fear, real or imaginary. And I have no condemnation strong enough for the man or woman who deliberately does so."

With this danger before her, she scarcely let Rodey out of her sight in the daytime. In the evening she always left a light in the room and the door half open. With all her senses quickened she could have heard him if he called ever so feebly.

He did call one evening and she started up on the instant to go to him. But Allan laid a hand on her wrist.

"You just sit still," he said.

She tried to pull her hand away.

"Let me go, Dane. It's Rodey."

"I know it's Rodey. You're going to stay here. I'll go up to him presently. If he cries he's got to cry. I'm not going to have this nonsense begun every night. You're getting perfectly silly about him!"

His grip on her wrist tightened, forcing her back into the chair. She struggled with him almost passionately; her face had turned suddenly white.

"Let me go, Dane—you're hurting my wrist! He's frightened. Oh, Dane, won't you *understand*! Let me go!"

"I understand that you're making yourself hysterical over nothing at all! Rodey's old enough to learn that if he chooses to wake up he's got to go to sleep again without any nonsense. I tell you I won't have this, and there's an end of it."

She had wrenched herself free from him, somehow, and flown to the door, but he caught her up on the step and pushed her back into the room. "I'm going to him," he said. He went past her, and she heard him mount the staircase unhurriedly and cross the floor of the room overhead.

Fear and anger had made her suddenly weak. She was trembling in every nerve, and she walked back unsteadily and sat down on the sofa near the window. She could not remember ever having been so angry with Dane in her life. A draught between door and window set the lamp on the table flaring. She sat staring at it mechanically, biting her lip, listening for the footsteps overhead.

When Allan came back he noticed the lamp flaring and turned it down. Then he settled himself at the table again with his book.

"There was nothing the matter with him whatever," he said. "He simply happened to wake up and didn't fancy being alone. I told him the next time he called no one would come to him."

"Dane, how dared you be so wicked!"

"Look here—" He turned round quietly in the chair and faced her, his hand gripping the back of it. "You had better understand that there's going to be an end to this business, here and now. I'm not speaking on the spur of the moment; I've been watching you for a long time past. You're getting to be perfectly absurd about Rodey! You seem to think he mustn't be left alone or allowed to look after himself for two minutes together. It's nothing but a ridiculous fancy you've got, and you're doing your best to make the child as excitable and imaginative as you are yourself."

"I am nothing of the sort!"

"I beg your pardon. I draw my conclusions from the way you act."

"You have no right to speak to me like that! I'm not a child. You have no right to talk about what you don't understand."

"You are talking hysterically, now. If you weren't nervous, what did you want to rush upstairs like that for to-night? What did you imagine was going to happen to him?"

"Nothing."

"Then what were you frightened about?"

She was silent.

"You admit you were frightened, and yet you can't say what for! If you don't call that being imaginative, I do."

She said tensely: "I wish to God we'd never come to Ren-nuthnoe!"

He looked at her sharply. She was sitting with her hands locked on her knee. The lamp-light made shadows on her white dress and fair, pretty hair, made her look for the moment, crouched there in the sofa corner, almost a shadow herself. Her face was strained, her eyes were unnaturally big and dark.

"Don't you like the place—or doesn't it suit you?"

"Yes—of course I like it."

"Then what's the matter?"

She looked at him again without speaking. She was wondering what the effect on him would be if she were now to tell him the whole truth; were to say to him as she longed to do a hundred times a day: "Dane, can't you see that it's the house—the house

that's hurting us, that's making us different? Can't you feel it—understand it?" Probably he would, in his present mood, tell her not to be theatrical. The very idea of any such appeal, as he sat there before her with solid masculine practicality and dogged common sense written in every inch of his figure, was an absurdity. And yet the temptation was stronger in her than it had ever been before to risk everything, to chance the improbable truth, and see if he would understand and believe her. She fought it down, but it mastered her to the point of her saying at last:

"If it didn't—would you go, Dane?"

"Of course we'd go," he answered irritably. "I should hope I care rather more about your health than I do for staying in any place on earth. But if it didn't, I should think you'd have had time to find it out before now. We've been down here going on for nine weeks, now." He was still watching her. "You're not ill, are you? If you think there's anything the matter with you, do for heaven's sake see Mandaunt to-morrow. If the place doesn't suit you you've surely got sense enough to say so. We've only about ten days more, any way. Are you ill?"

"No."

She laughed, and again he looked at her with that odd quickness she had noticed once or twice of late. But this time he crossed the floor, as she got up restlessly from the sofa, and put his hand not ungentle on her shoulder.

"Look here, old girl, you do worry me. Do you honestly think you're ill?"

With the touch of his hand her nerve came back to her. After all, there were only ten days more. She could go through with it for ten days. Each morning now, when she woke, she counted one off, like a prisoner. "I told you I wasn't. I haven't got the look of a prospective corpse, have I?"

"You're about as depressing as one!" he burst out. "I do wish to heaven I knew what was the matter with you!"

"Dane!"

But he almost flung himself away from her. "Oh, hang it!" he cried, sharply.

He took his pipe from the table and went out into the garden.

XII.

A few days later, at lunch, Allan said to his wife: "Do you care if we stay on for another week?"

"Why, no!"

"I saw the agent this morning," he went on, helping himself

to bread. "He says we can have the house till the fourteenth, if we like. That's just a week from Saturday. There are one or two things I should be glad to finish. I lost pretty well ten days, rotting about that time. It won't matter to you, will it—you didn't want to get back to town particularly?"

"No, indeed. It's lovely here, just now."

"That's right, then. I'll tell him."

After lunch was over she went up to her room and for the first time in two years sat down on the bed and cried. She gave herself up to sheer helpless sobbing, her face buried in her hands, and the relief for once did her good. It seemed to her hopelessly that they were never going to get away from the house, that she was doomed to a lingering, endless extension of last weeks. It was as if some relentless fate, quite outside Dane's natural wish to get his pictures finished, were putting back the clock that marked the hours to her release. She had strung herself up to stand it for a certain definite time, and now that the time was lengthened she felt that it was impossible to make her endurance stretch to meet it.

After a woman has sat down and cried about a thing, it never seems half so big. She got up presently and washed her face and went downstairs with a new sense of comfort in having got the worst of it, for the time being, over; feeling to some degree ready to meet trouble there was no avoiding.

The Jaeger was in the kitchen, stirring flour in a big wooden bowl.

"I'm goin' to make splits for tea, Mrs. Allan," she said. "Mr. Allan do like 'em. Gone painting, is he?"

The Jaeger took an indulgent interest in Dane's work, on the score of having "done for" a Londoner who lived at Trescoe two years and was a beautiful artist. She was always reminding Dane of things which, in her opinion, he belonged to paint, as a solemn duty, because every artist who came to Rennuthnoe always did paint them. If this were true, it accounted for a certain sameness, as exemplified in Academy sea-scapes, which had always led Dane to believe, until he came down here, that one part of Cornwall was precisely like another part, and that all the artists lived in one place.

It wounded Mrs. Jago's pride that he refused to perpetuate either the fishing-boats at Cadgewith, or Kynance, with the water coming out of the blow-holes, with the peculiar solid effect it achieved in the pictures one encountered for sale on the walls of local tea-rooms. Every place which advertised tea had two or more of these mournful monuments to local artistic aspiration,

hung prominently in gilt frames. Dane used to stand in front of them for ten minutes at a stretch while they waited for the bill, examining the very green sticky water, the conventional triangular jags of rock—painstakingly accurate and regular—in the foreground, the little cotton-wool clouds stuck forlornly about the sky, and the barque which was always putting out to sea, under threatening atmospheric conditions, and wonder quite honestly how it was all done.

They were easy, with a little practice, to identify. If there was a three-cornered rock anywhere in the picture, it was some view of Kynance Cove; if the cliffs were precipitous and the water very woolly, it was the Lizard; or if the cliffs were pink and the water woollier still, Land's End in a gale. Supposing these pictures to stand for Cornwall's idea of its own native surroundings, one could not but feel the universal good-humour of the people to have a certain heroic quality worthy of admiration.

"He do paint a lot, don't he?" said Mrs. Jaeger, rubbing the flour through her hands. "I suppose he'll sell all them pictures when he gets back to London?"

"Some," said Mrs. Allan. It was always wiser to be truthful with the Jaeger. "He hasn't finished all he wants to do, yet," she added. "We are going to stay on another week, to give him time."

"That'll be nice for you," said the Jaeger heartily.

"Yes."

"He's lookin' better, don't you think, Mrs. Allan? He ain't the same man he was. He'll go back to London so strong 'is friends won't know him."

"Yes, he is better. It's done him good, I think."

"You aren't," said the Jaeger unexpectedly.

"Oh, I'm all right," she smiled. "I'm feeling splendid."

The Jaeger looked at her reflectively.

"Well, maybe you're one of the sort that belongs to look peaky," she said eventually. "Some folks do. My sister, up along to Trescoe, she's one. You always put me in mind of her, Mrs. Allan. She's awful poor-looking."

Mrs. Allan rose abruptly and went into the garden. Outside the air was cool and fresh, the breeze driving in across a sea toned to the fleeting shades of green and purple one gets only on a rocky coast. She leaned her arms on the low sea-ward wall and looked down at the little strip of shingle left bare by the tide, sun-warmed rocks and brown tossed seaweed. Some freshly tarred lobster pots were set out to dry; the smell of them came up to

her, as she leaned over, with the familiar general odour of fishiness and decaying weed.

If it were not for the house, she felt, she would be almost sorry to leave Rennuthnoe. It was a pleasant, kindly little place. She was friendly by now with everyone in it, the post-mistress, the itinerant greengrocer, old rheumatic Mary, who kept the little shop where one bought green apples and potatoes and sticks of chocolate, and who always called her "my dear!" She had even developed a genuine affection for the Jaeger. It was unreciprocated; the Jaeger tolerated her, even liked her, but Mrs. Allan had long ago detected that she did not, so far as private judgment went, consider her quite the right kind of wife for Dane. Still the Jaeger was nice to her, in a high-handed, domineering way; she had done her best to make the time a happy one for all three of them.

If only it had not been for the Mitchells—the Mitchells who had contrived, with no conscious malice, to spoil and warp the whole summer! And again, almost against her will, there appealed to her, as it had done a hundred times before, the infinite pathos of the barrier that was between them and her, that made even their dumb instinctive reaching for friendship meet only with distrust and repugnance, forced it to work inevitably against its own ends. She had never realised before how utterly the dead are put apart from the living, how real is their helplessness.

"The strong man's yearning for his kind
Shall shake at most the window-blind,
Or dull awhile the card room's cheer."

She remembered a Catholic priest who had said once, in a sermon preached on All Souls' Eve: "When our friends die we are very sorry, and we make a great fuss and weeping, and we bury them up and put flowers on their graves, but once they are dead they are dead. We don't want them to come back again. In fact, we are very much annoyed if they do. We put them under the earth and say: 'Stay there, please, for goodness' sake—we don't want to have any more communication with you!'"

Wasn't it rather heartlessly true? They were supposed to be content with that. But were they content? Didn't they want a little more, sometimes? Mightn't there be other reasons that drew them back to old scenes, old surroundings, besides the only conventional motives allowed them, of drawing attention to an unknown murder or a hidden will—kindlier, simpler things, that the living could, if they chose, understand and sympathize with?

She thought of Jethro Mitchell. She fancied that he had kept away from her, wistfully, of late; that he had divined with his quicker intuition the change in her attitude; it had been as little her fault as the cause of it had been his. It was all a part of the separate laws governing each, which made inevitably for antagonism.

Thinking of him, it was scarcely a surprise, turning her head, to see him, for the first time in nearly two weeks, standing at a little distance from her, leaning upon the wall even as she leaned. He looked simply as any living stranger might look, standing there, and again there swept over her the curious wonder that she shouldn't be afraid. She wasn't afraid; she had so little dread of him that she could have crossed the space between them and laid her hand on his arm, and what kept her from doing so was only what would have naturally kept her had he been a living man. There seemed nothing strange about him—nothing. She had time to think it all out, to wonder, in the moment before he turned away as he always turned, wistfully, wearily, and walked across the little shaven lawn with its box bushes to the house door. And there, mysteriously as always, without being able to catch even the second of his disappearance, she lost sight of him. She turned, too, after a moment, and walked slowly back by the way he had taken.

XIII.

MRS. JAGO arrived one morning with a great tale of corpse-lights seen on the Burrow Sands. The Allans rather sceptically attributed her enthusiasm on the subject to an attempt to trick them into overlooking the fact that she was an hour and a half late, and that they had had to get up and make their own coffee for breakfast. But she enlarged upon the story so graphically that even Dane, just returned from the beach with a wet towel slung round his neck, paused with some amount of interest to listen. Her husband, it appeared, had seen them, and Joe Ivey and Willy Tredwin; five or six of them, little blue lights going up and down the sands.

Allan laughed. "Someone going home from Trescoe," he said, "with a pipe that wouldn't draw!"

But the Jaeger would have none of his frivolity.

"It's no Trescoe lad nor no Rennuthnoe lad that'd come home along them sands at night, Mr. Allan!"

"Well, who's going to be drowned, or isn't it settled yet?"

Doesn't somebody "belong" to be drowned, as you say, when they see them?"

"I don't say who it'll be nor when," returned the Jaeger. "But I do know it'll be for a Rennuthnoe man, Mr. Allan. They only belong to be seen for Rennuthnoe men. I've lived here this thirty year come Christmas, and many a time I've seen 'em, up along. They was seen before the wreck of the steamer that had four Rennuthnoe men aboard her, winter before last, and they was washed up here on these sands, and they was seen when Joe Ivey's brother from the coastguards and old Dakin and two others put out in a boat one night for conger, and they was all drunk, and Billy Ivey, 'e was the drunkest, and they jibed her, out there off the rocks, and she turned smack over'n drowned the four of them, and the last of the bodies didn't come ashore up for two weeks or more. No, it'll be a Rennuthnoe man, Mr. Allan."

"I see," said Dane. "It's a sort of local celebration, in fact." He hung his towel across a chair-back and sat down to the belated breakfast. "If any common person like myself, for instance, went out there and got drowned, they wouldn't bother to hang any lights out for me? Well, well—I'm going down to the Burrows, painting, this afternoon, Mrs. Jago. If I come across any Price's night-lights or anything of the kind knocking around there I'll bring 'em back to you!"

The Jaeger met his irreverence with a pitying dignity, but she relented so far as to cut sandwiches for his mid-day meal. He went out early and did not get back till after six; he was working against time to get his picture through before the September spell of fine weather broke. Mrs. Allan spent the afternoon with Rodey down on the rocks. It was one of those days when the sunlight makes a clear golden haze over the land; there was a soft mackerel sky, and the sea was like a lake of limpid blue fire. But the wind freshened towards evening, and long switch-like clouds came up against the sunset. It was the most beautiful sunset they had had that year, a wide arch of broken rose and gold, deepening near the horizon to a vivid angry purple. She and Dane stood to watch it, when he got back, from the front garden.

"See those clouds," said Allan, biting on his pipe as he watched them. "They mean wind. I shouldn't be surprised if we had a real good gale to-morrow. I'm glad I got my picture through."

His words reminded her of something. "Dane, you hurt the Jaeger's feelings deeply this morning."

"What?" He was facing the vast epic of rose and gold with a sort of dreamy rapture. "Oh, nonsense!"

"Oh, *you* can jeer at anything," his wife reminded him. She had long ago expressed herself as resigned to the Jaeger's attachment to Allan. "We shall miss her, shan't we? We ought to take her back with us; she'd keep your studio in order for you. Can you picture the Jaeger in a West Kensington flat?"

"No. She's one of those delicate blossoms that wouldn't bear transplanting. I expect she'll hibernate through the winter, and wake up, refreshed by slumber, ready to spoil the next lot of people that come down here."

They were sitting in the dining-room, both unadmittedly sleepy, and waiting till it was decently late enough for Mrs. Allan to go out into the kitchen and make the two cups of cocoa which the chilly evenings of the past week had made them glad of in the half-hour before bedtime. Allan was thinking that it ought to be later than ten, and his wife was wondering whether there would be enough cocoa left without having to open a new tin, when all at once a sound, curiously distinct against the tumult of the wind in the chimneys, roused them with a jerk. Dane took the pipe from his mouth and listened, lifting his head. The sound came again, in a momentary lull of the gale.

"Listen!" said Mrs. Allan. "Who's shooting?"

Allan had spent two winter months by the sea once before. He got up and went to the window.

"There's some boat in trouble," he said. "She must be a good way out, by the sound. Which way is the wind?"

"I wonder if it's a steamer?"

"A steamer oughtn't to be so close in—not unless she's out of her course. There—did you hear it?"

They moved on a common impulse to the front door, and opened it. Allan had to hold it ajar; the wind swept past them in a strong gust through the hall, making the lamp-flame jump and flicker, and with it came the rain, newly begun again, driven in against their faces out of the darkness. They listened for some minutes, but heard nothing more. Presently Allan closed the door, leaning against it while he turned his coat-collar up.

"Get on with the cocoa. I'll be back in a minute. I'm just going outside to have a look round."

She went into the kitchen, and put the kettle further over the fire. Mrs. Jago's parting care was visible in an unusual tidiness and order, a general effect of absent-minded clearing up. She had quite a hunt for the cocoa tin, put away on the back shelf of the dresser. When she found it there was only enough for one

position, seemed to rock and quiver to the buffeting of the south-west wind. The Allans, kept indoors, spent the morning over such packing as could conveniently be done in advance, and after lunch, the rain having exhausted its earliest force, Mrs. Allan put on a mackintosh and Dane's cycling cap and walked down with him to the shore. All colour seemed wiped out from the landscape; the waves beat in sullenly against the rocks, sky and sea were of a uniform neutral tone, and they were glad enough, after standing for a few minutes at a point where they could scarcely hear their own voices, to get back to the shelter of roof and walls.

"There's one advantage about Cornwall," said Dane philosophically, as they made their way homeward. "You can always tell when it's raining."

Towards the close of the next day the sky lifted a little, and the rain slackened, but the wind was as high as ever. Mrs. Allan had full opportunity to satisfy a curiosity expressed, in the early summer, as to what Kinlow House would be like in really bad weather. At times it seemed that every board in the old flooring creaked, and that only force of gravity kept the house to its moorings. It would have surprised neither of them to look out of window, after an unusually vicious gust, and find themselves transported a couple of miles inland. But the stones kept together, by the same structural miracle that had kept them together during the storms of over half a century, and the grunting of joists and timbers came to have merely the tone of a comfortable grumbling at the stress of weather, the conversational greeting of the middle-aged rheumatic dwelling to an old friend in the sturdy south-westerly gale.

Mrs. Jago's attitude towards the Allans, now that their stay was drawing so nearly to a close, took a certain persistent tenderness, a rigid kindly autocracy. She ordered them about more than ever, took every opportunity for domineering, and went out of her way to do them small services, all with an air of wondering gloomily how they were going to get along without her when they got back to London. She hovered over them at meal-times almost to the point of embarrassment, and collected all Dane's socks privately from the laundry-basket and took them home to darn. She darned the toes of his bicycle stockings with black worsted, and there was as much real affection as laughter in his wife's smile as she held them up for him to see.

"Dear old Jaeger," said Allan contemplatively. "So she's forgiven my jecring at her corpse-lights!"

"Oh, *you* can jeer at anything," his wife reminded him. She had long ago expressed herself as resigned to the Jaeger's attachment to Allan. "We shall miss her, shan't we? We ought to take her back with us; she'd keep your studio in order for you. Can you picture the Jaeger in a West Kensington flat?"

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cup. She got the new tin out of the cupboard and looked about for a knife to open it.

She had her hand on the dresser drawer, pulling it open, when some instinct made her turn round. Jethro Mitchell was standing in the doorway, just beyond. He stood as if he had come to a pause there, naturally, and by the lowered light of the hall lamp behind him she had for the first time a view of his face, the face of a fair man of perhaps fifty. He was looking straight at her, but she felt that he did not see her, that she had no more significance for him than some piece of furniture in the room; his gaze seemed caught and held, like the gaze of a sleep-walker, fixed on some unseen thing beyond, and with the thrill which the strange blank intensity of his look gave her there came another deeper thrill which his presence seemed now for the first time to quicken in her, of a real unfathomable fear. She had never been afraid of him till this moment, but she was afraid now; the feeling, an unreasonable antagonistic dread, swept over her, and she could not battle with it, scarcely even recognise it as the feeling she had missed so curiously in her former encounters with him. It seemed to grip rigidly every nerve in her body, to hold her powerless, voiceless. Though she had seen him, almost brushed past him, a dozen times before, had always regarded him in her mind as an apparition, it was as though the fact were for the first time brought home to her with a new and vivid clearness, making her see him with a sharper distinctness.

She seemed in a strange way to realise all at once that he was dead; to be conscious of the barrier between them. She knew vaguely that this, somehow, was real; that this was how she had always known she would feel. It all happened in a moment, the feeling, the consciousness, and then he turned slowly, still without seeing her, and passed across the hall to the dining-room almost in the second that she heard Dane's hand on the front door latch.

It seemed impossible to her that Dane should not have seen him, have met him face to face as he came through the hall. If he had, he said nothing of it, and the whiteness of her own face might have accounted for the curious look he gave her as he came into the room.

"Got the cocoa made yet?"

"It will be in a minute."

She turned away, dreading that he should see the trembling of her fingers as she handled the cups and spoons. He turned down his collar, and brushed the rain drops from his coat.

"Did you hear anything more, Dane?"

"No. Maybe it wasn't a boat. It sounded like it. If it was I don't suppose it'll come ashore here." He moved nearer the table, and stood watching her. "I suppose you know you've put cocoa in that cup twice over!"

She could not have told afterwards why she said it. The thing simply came to her, as she turned, facing him.

"Dane," she said, "Jethro Mitchell is dead."

* * * * *

She was roused from sleep that night by a sound which seemed to shake the house, the report as if of a cannon and a long-drawn whistling scream. She sat up, in the first bewilderment of violently broken slumber, to see, by the shaded candle on the chest of drawers, that Dane was already out of bed and beginning to dress.

"What's the matter—what's happening?" she exclaimed.

"It's a wreck in shore. That was the rocket woke you. I'm just going down with them. You don't mind being left?"

He was hunting through the room for his belt, tossing things about in a reckless boyish excitement.

"It's on the chair there. I'll be all right. Take care of yourself, Dane!" As he caught up his coat with a final snatch and ran down the stairs she called after him. "Dane! Dane! You haven't got enough on. You'll get——"

But he was already gone. She got out of bed, fully awake by now, and into a dressing-gown, belting it round her waist, and found a pair of slippers. She lit the lamp from the candle, and carried it downstairs to the dining-room. She could hear the rain still beating in a steady drench on the lawn outside. When she returned to the bedroom she looked at Rodey; he was still sleeping, though uneasily. The noise of the rocket, which seemed to her to have split the very sky overhead, had barely roused him. She hesitated a moment, then rolled him up, blanket and all, and carried him down and laid him on a corner of the sofa.

From the window, level with the garden, she could see nothing, and she ran up again and opened the bedroom window wide to lean out. Even then there was little enough to see. The garden wall cut off her view of the cliff, but somewhere beyond in the murky darkness she could make out lights moving to and fro, and one larger one that was steady, nearer to the shore, where she knew the rocket apparatus was rigged. Small shadows appeared to gather round and shut it out momentarily, and presently, a good mile out, it seemed to her, another faint yellow streak shot up, glimmered a moment on the curtain of blackness and was gone. She thought that this light must be on the ship;

it seemed to her helplessly far out, as well as she could judge of distance in the darkness.

But there was nothing else to see, nothing to watch; the rain drove in against the curtains and her bare head as she leaned out, and presently she closed the window again, and went downstairs. Rodey was still asleep. Dane must be somewhere on the rocks where the lights were; she worried about him a little, but her worry was chiefly because he was out there in the wet with only his thin house-coat, and she didn't know what boots he had on.

Her nerves were at the extreme tension which produces calmness. She looked at the clock. It was only a quarter to one, now, though it seemed to her that she must have been asleep for hours before the rocket woke her. There was nothing to be gained by watching and listening; she could be of no direct help, so she set about doing what she could indoors. The kitchen grate was still warm, and she raked the embers together, putting more wood on, and refilled the kettle. Dane would want hot whiskey when he came in, and there might be others with him. She got the whiskey out of the sideboard ready, and then she remembered a little travelling flask of brandy in the bedroom cupboard, and fetched that too; it might be wanted.

She took another look at the kitchen fire—it was burning brightly—and then opened the front door and went out, leaving it ajar behind her. The darkness was impenetrable; she had never realised before what travellers meant when they described a night as inky. This darkness was just that; the garden seemed a solid blot of black, and she had to grope her way. The street lamps were still alight, and outside the gate she saw a woman standing in the shadow, with a shawl drawn over her head against the wind. Glad of any companionship, she went over to her, and the two began to talk with the instant friendship of a common excitement. The girl—she was little more, Mrs. Allan could see her face under the shawl, thin and pretty, with dark hair fastened into curling-pins for the morrow's chapel-going—seemed to know all about the wreck; her father was one of the coast-guards down on the shore.

"It's a coasting steamer, miss, goin' to Penzance. Please? No, miss, on'y disabled, I think. She's off the rocks out there. You see, they fire them rockets——"

Two men ran by, and she broke off to call after them in her high treble. "Tommy! You Tommy Oates! I want you. Tell grandfer——ah, yer soft slop!" she flung at his retreating heels.

"Will they put the boats out?" Mrs. Allan asked. "My husband is down with the men," she added.

"They won't belong to, miss, not unless she's nearer in shore. You see——" she stopped again, nervously, listening for a sound out of the darkness. "The current's crool, out there. My little brother, 'e was drowned off the Burrows last summer, in swimmin', an' my 'usband, 'e was out there in a boat, an' it upset, three years ago come next month. That was up nearer this way."

"Couldn't he swim?" Mrs. Allan asked.

"'E was boozed, miss," said the girl, simply.

They lapsed into silence. Mrs. Allan kept thinking determinedly that she wouldn't let herself worry about Dane, but she knew she was doing it all the time. If there was a boat launched he would never keep out of it; she knew him only too well. It wasn't that she grudged him; she wouldn't have had him at home for the world, but the knowledge that he was out there, somewhere, and that she didn't know where he was or what he was doing kept her nerves on the stretch; she imagined a hundred reckless possibilities. She was getting wet through herself; she did not notice it until the girl outside the gate said:

"You oughtn't to be standin' out here, miss, with nothin' more on you."

She roused herself then to realise that it was raining still. Her bare feet were chilled through her wet slippers; her dressing-gown was of thin flannel and she had only a nightdress underneath. She turned and went indoors. Rodey was lying tucked up just as she had left him; she found time to be grateful that he did sleep like this, and shifted a sofa cushion to keep the light from his face. She knelt before the kitchen fire a moment, warming her chilled fingers, before she went back to the dining-room to wait.

She could not sit still, then, but moved restlessly from hall to kitchen, from door to window, through a long three-quarters of an hour which seemed to her to stretch into centuries, before her pulse quickened at the slow creak of the front gate, the sound of steps on gravel.

It was her husband who came in first. Not until she saw him standing before her, tall and safe and living, in the lighted hall, did she realise how much she had worried about him, and feared for him. Her only thought for the moment was that she had him safe again. She looked at him, standing there in his wet clothes, as if he had been given back to her by a miracle out of sea and storm and darkness, but the only thing she said was:

"Oh, Dane, you shouldn't have gone out in your tennis shoes!"

He looked at her gravely, and put his hands on her shoulders,

pushing her gently back into the room. "Go inside and wait," he said.

Then for the first time she looked beyond him, and saw men in the doorway. She did not go, only moved closer against the wall as they passed by her with their burden, treading with their wet creaking boots on the floor, to the open door of the sitting-room. They were two of the village fishermen, and the third who was with them was a Rennuthnoe man, too, and she knew that she did not need to look at his face. She had seen it before.

They carried him into the room and laid him down on the sofa, with the stealthy care with which men handle those to whom roughness and care are alike, a fair-haired middle-aged man in clothes dripping still with sea-water, and the South African tan on his face; and Allan took the cover from the table and silently laid it over him.

So it was that the last of the Mitchells came home.

XV.

Two comparatively uneventful years have done much to weaken in Allan's mind at least the recollection of their stay in Kinlow House. That summer has receded with others into the pleasant middle distance of memory. His explanation, when he speaks of it at all, is that the place wasn't healthy, the drains were all wrong, and things got on their nerves.

His wife, on the whole, is very well content to let it go at that. Sometimes she has thought that she would tell him the whole story, but she never has; what keeps her from doing so is perhaps less an increasing knowledge, as time goes on, of the happy depths of Dane's British common-sense, than a feeling of responsibility towards certain dead people with whose lives she was brought so oddly, for a time, in contact. She feels towards the Mitchells precisely as she would towards any other people of whom chance had made her the temporary guest. They chose, in their strange silent way, to involve her, to draw her in with themselves, but the story of Kinlow House, with its tragic termination, remains their story, not hers. Her part in it ended, in a way as unexplained as it had begun, on the night when she sat listening to Dane's cheerful voice in the kitchen, while in the room across the passage the man who had best right to the hospitality of Kinlow House rested for the first time for thirty years, beneath its roof.

Something of the feeling of that night comes back to her always when she thinks of Jethro Mitchell, the man whom she

never saw in life, and yet came to know so intimately; a sense of peaceful termination, of the spirit of the old house gone definitely out from it. This was what it wanted, had restlessly waited for and expected through its thirty years of lonely silence. Henceforward it would be simply as any other old house; its dignified reserve would betray nothing, its floors creak expectantly to no footstep.

She finds it difficult to dissociate the story of the last Mitchell from the story of the house itself; he is always in her mind so closely one with it. Looking back, she is conscious that the whole, as affecting herself, was only one influence, which might equally well have been Jethro Mitchell, or the house, or both. That she did see him she has no doubt; he was too actually real for that, and by a curious clinging to first impressions she thinks of him always rather as a living, sensitive personality than a dead man. His history had after all little enough of the dramatic in it; it becomes in memory simply that of a man who once lived in a house, and loved it, and afterwards returned to it.

Knowing how strangely his spirit had been drawn back to it in life, there seemed to her no strangeness in this final silent homecoming, which gave Rennuthnoe for three weeks a new subject of discussion. He had done generously by the village from first to last in the matter of gossip, but this would be their last chance for talking of him; she knew that whoever, in years to come, might live in Kinlow House, would see no more of Jethro Mitchell.

MARGERY WILLIAMS.

The Muramasa Sword.

ICHIDA FUZAEMON was without a master. His former lord, the Daimyo of Izumo, had found it necessary to reduce the number of his followers. A few, who had served him many years, he retained about his person. The greater number, among whom was Ichida, he dismissed with presents and expressions of good will. So Ichida became a *ronin*, a "wave-man," or wandering soldier of fortune, and set forth upon his travels.

He was young and handsome and of great strength. From his earliest youth he had been trained to the business of fighting. Now in the days when Ichida lived there was plenty of fighting to be got in Japan. The great Emperor Taiko Sama had recently died, leaving a son five years of age to succeed him. Around the person of the boy two great factions had grown up. From dissension in the council chamber they had reached the threshold of war. To Ichida, indifferent as to whom he fought for, so that he did fight, it was open to join either faction, and he went on his way with a light heart. It would be strange, he thought, if he did not succeed in obtaining fresh employment.

He went eastwards along the coast as far as Wakasa. Here it became necessary that he should make his choice. Should he push on eastwards through the country to join with Prince Iyeyasu Tokugawa, then at Yedo; or should he, turning south, gain Osaka, where the Christian Prince, Mitsunari, and the Daimyos of Chosu and Satsuma, were collecting a mighty army in preparation for the coming struggle? The reports which reached him of the great wealth and the immense population of Osaka decided him. "That is the city for me," he said, and he turned southwards by way of Lake Biwa in the hope of reaching it. On the southern shores of the lake he passed a clump of pine trees which stood upon his left hand. From the midst of these came the sound of blows mingled with cries for help. Ichida rejoiced in the chance of a fight, and drawing his sword dashed in among the trees.

Reaching a little clearing, he beheld an old man and a young girl in the hands of three robbers. Two of them had bound the old man to a tree, whilst the girl knelt before the third with outstretched hands, begging for mercy. Ichida did not hesitate for a moment, but drew his sword and advanced upon the robbers. These, seeing that they were three to one, sprang to meet him; but after a few passes, becoming convinced that they were engaged with a swordsman greatly superior to themselves, they turned and fled. The last to fly stooped as he did so, and picking up a small box which lay upon the ground, vanished after his comrades. Ichida put up his weapon, and turning with great politeness to the old man, begged to know how the misfortune had occurred.

"I cannot call it altogether a misfortune that has led me to make the acquaintance of so valiant a *samurai*," replied the stranger, bending his head as far as his bonds allowed, "but let me ask you to sever these cords with which I am bound, and I will then inform you how I came to fall into their hands."

Ichida drew his shorter sword and with one sweep of his arm set the stranger at liberty. The girl had risen, and now stood looking at him with an expression of gratitude and admiration. She did not speak. She knew her duty too well to do so, while her father was engaged in conversation with a noble knight.

"My name is Kira Nagamasa," said the old man, "I am a merchant of Osaka. It has long been my custom to travel the country with specimens of the *cloisonné* ware in which I deal. My business took me to see the lord of Tsuruga, and I set out on foot accompanied by my daughter. These fellows must have learned in Tsuruga that I had upon me a considerable quantity of money. As I was returning they set upon me. The rest you know."

As he said these words the girl uttered a piercing cry and looked upon the ground behind her.

"My father," she cried—"the money! It has gone!"

"Gone!" said the old man fiercely. "Gone—the money that I entrusted to you! Why did you let it go?"

"Indeed," replied the girl, falling upon her knees, "when we were attacked, I threw the box containing it into that clump of bushes. I saw where it fell. It is not there now."

Ichida searched the bushes with his sword. "One of these knaves must have taken it," he said, "and you were too much alarmed to observe him."

Kira addressed the girl sternly. "Unhappy girl," he cried,

"through you I am a ruined man. You deserve nothing less than death. And if this valiant knight will lend me his sword I will see that you obtain your deserts."

His daughter made no reply. But Ichida spoke boldly; for the girl was very beautiful.

"I will lend my sword for no such purpose," he said; "hitherto it has struck but men, armed to strike back again."

The girl looked up at him in gratitude, and Kira himself smiled at the ardour of his speech.

"Sir," he said, "I perceive you are as merciful as you are brave. It is indeed good of you to interest yourself in so worthless an object. Get up, O Matsu," he said to the girl. "Since this noble *samurai* will have it so, I spare you. And for you, sir," he went on, speaking to Ichida, "I should be glad of your company and protection upon our further journey. Though I am now a poor man I have friends in Osaka; and I do not doubt that I shall be able to recompense you according to your great services."

"My recompense will be to know that I have served you," replied Ichida. He spoke very proudly; for he wished to show the stranger that he was above recompense from one whom, not being of the military class, he regarded as his inferior.

So together they resumed their journey. They came by Otsu and so on to Osaka. Now, during the journey, Ichida did not fail to notice the beauty of the girl O Matsu. She was dark and slender, and her expression was both sweet and obliging; so that many times his eyes rested on her when he thought she was not looking; but the truth is she saw his glances and treasured them in her heart; only she would not let him think she had seen them lest he should think her forward to return them.

At the end of the second day they reached Osaka. Ichida thought he had never seen so fine a town. The castle built by the late emperor impressed him with a sense of immense strength. The streets were full of a hurrying crowd going to and fro about their various occupations. Ichida saw many *samurai* like himself, their two swords girded in their sashes, wearing the livery of the various southern *daimyos* then assembled in the town. As he passed these he averted his face and hurried on; for the truth was he was somewhat ashamed to be seen in company with a mere merchant. Kira Nagamasa, on the other hand, wished to go slowly. He was busy looking for acquaintances among the crowd to whom he might unfold the tale of his griefs. However, he saw none, and in response to the solicitations of his daughter, he began to go faster, and at length led

the party down one of the side streets in the neighbourhood of the harbour where his house stood.

Here he pressed Ichida to enter. The young man was at first somewhat unwilling. Now that he had reached Osaka, the goal of his ambitions, and had escorted his companions to a place of safety, he wished for nothing better than to be rid of them. He wanted to go out into the streets to inquire who among the nobles was richest and most powerful, and which of them was likely to admit him into service. He thought it would be a good thing to seek out some place where *samurai* were assembled, and introducing himself, to give them some taste of his experience with the sword.

Kira, however, pressed his offer so that it would have been a rudeness to refuse; and O Matsu, though she said nothing, looked at him in a manner which gave him to understand that he was very welcome. The girl had been greatly impressed with his gallantry and courtesy. From the first moment when he had come so opportunely to the aid of her father and of herself, she thought she had never seen so fine a man. She hid the thing in her heart, knowing well that it was not to be hoped that a *samurai* would look twice upon the humble daughter of a merchant. Nevertheless love had sprung up within her, and she hugged it in secret, the sweeter for that very secrecy.

She prepared the evening meal of rice and dried fish. She waited on the two men assiduously, and hoped that her guest would be satisfied with her attentions. She herself could not partake of food until they had finished. Kira ate slowly and deliberately, and at times was absent in his manner as if thinking over something of very grave import. At length he rose, and his guest with him.

"Noble sir," he said, "do not take exception to my words when I say that I have observed in you since you came to my house a certain degree of impatience. It is but natural that you should feel this; for in this city you have your way to make, and it is not among merchants that you can make it. Yet I think you will not be sorry that you have honoured me when I tell you the manner in which I have decided to recompense your kindness. Money I have none, since this good-for-nothing girl lost that which I was bringing with me. But one thing of great value I have. Your sword, though doubtless a good one, cannot be worthy of the courage of its owner. Now in the next room I have the finest sword in all Japan. It is a Masamune, pledged to me by a *daimyo* who is since dead. It is worth much money and you might fairly ask me why I do not sell it, for it would

restore my somewhat broken fortunes. But I have nothing else to give; and because of what you have done for me and mine, you shall have it."

A Masamune! Ichida's heart beat high at the mention of the famous sword-maker of ancient times. He had never seen such a weapon. Even the Lord of Izumo, who had a curious taste in swords, had not possessed one. He followed Kira into the adjacent room in a state of eager excitement.

Kira pointed to the opposite wall. Upon it hung the famous sword. It was plainer in the hilt and scabbard than the weapons of a later day, yet there was some curious carving about the handle. Kira took it from its place on the wall, and handed it to Ichida. He turned it over and over in his hands.

The carving represented a demon who wound himself about the handle away from the blade. The face looked directly upwards from the top of the hilt, and the two eyes were picked out with jewels that glittered with a deep red glow, that had in it something of menace. The face wore a curious expression of malignity, so that Ichida was glad to turn away from it, and drawing the blade, to become lost in admiration of its marvellous temper. He ran his thumb along its edge and wondered at its sharpness. He poised it and was delighted at its weight and balance. Then he turned to the hilt and examined it with more attention; and as he did so his face grew grave.

"Why do you tell me a falsehood about this sword?" he asked. "This is not a Masamune, but a sword made by another and more famous maker than he. This is a Muramasa."

Kira sighed. "It is true," he said, "the sword is a Muramasa. I did not expect that you would have recognised it. I did not tell you fearing that you might not accept it; for though he was a great sword-maker, it is well known that many of his blades are unlucky, and entail great disaster upon their owners."

"I am not easily frightened by such tales," said Ichida boldly, "and if you will give me the sword I will thank you for it, and will take any risks that may be attached to it. It would be a monstrous thing that should come between me and a weapon like this."

"Since you know so much," returned Kira gravely, "you shall know all. This sword is not only a Muramasa, it is the last that Muramasa ever made. It is said that he prayed continually over it, that when finished it might possess a soul. He asked, indeed, that his own soul might pass into it, but this was not granted to him. I know not whether his first prayer was granted, but of a truth the thing has a spirit of some kind, and this much is

certain—there is no sword like it in all Japan. It will cut through an opposing sword as if it were a lath. But its owner must love and value it above all things upon earth. While he does so, it will serve him as never yet sword served man; but should the day come when he places any person or object above it in his estimation, it will betray him at the moment he most needs it. Only the sacrifice of that which he has placed above it will appease its anger. Now judge and say whether you will take the sword."

Ichida laughed boldly. "I take the sword," he said, "what is there in life that a young man should value more? This is a wonderful tale that you have told me. I do not doubt it. But at least it will not be long before I put some part of its truth to the test."

Kira bowed and the two men returned to the front room. O Matsun, who had been kneeling, clearing away the dishes from the floor, looked up and saw Ichida with the sword. Her face paled.

"My most honourable father," she said, "I trust that you have told the noble *samurai* the story of the sword that you have just given him."

Her father did not answer; but Ichida spoke.

"I know all about it," he said. "I am not frightened by such tales. It is a beautiful sword, and your father is most generous to give it to me. And now that I have it I will bid you farewell; for I must go forth to find service with some *daimyo*, and with this I am sure of acceptance."

He bowed formally to Kira who returned his bow with equal civility. O Matsun bent low upon the floor. When she raised her head again, Ichida was gone.

Ichida went forth into the crowded streets looking about him keenly. He wanted some adventure, some enterprise, whereby he might gain a footing in the life of the town, which he now viewed only from the standpoint of a stranger. To a young man possessing such a sword and eager to employ it, an opportunity was not far to seek. He had come into an open square not far from the palace, when he observed three *samurai* clad in a livery that he did not know, standing on the opposite side of the square. He crossed boldly and pushed by them, taking care to brush somewhat rudely against the tallest of them as he did so.

This was quite enough. The man turned round, and bowing with great politeness, drew his sword and requested Ichida to do the same. His companions drew theirs; so that Ichida, with the Muramasa blade unsheathed, found himself on guard against

three antagonists. As he raised his sword, he became aware of a feeling of exultation far in excess of anything he had ever felt when going into battle before. It seemed as though some mysterious influence came from the weapon itself, nerving his arm and thrilling through his whole frame.

With a joyful cry he struck downwards with all his strength on the guard of his first antagonist's blade, shearing through it as if it had been of wood. The *samurai* sprang back with a wild cry of astonishment, saving himself from what had else been certain death. Ichida was about to rush in and finish the attack, when his antagonist put up his hand and stopped him.

"Sir," he said, bowing very low to Ichida, "I perceive by your skill with your weapon that you are a very famous knight whom one might, indeed, be proud to encounter. Nevertheless you wear no livery and are therefore unknown to us. Be pleased to tell us, before we proceed further, whence you come and what lord you serve."

"My name is Ichida Fuzaemon, I served the lord Izumo. But for some time I have been a *ronin* and am even now seeking a new service."

The three men drew together and spoke low to each other, all the while glancing at Ichida.

"If you seek service," his late antagonist at length said, "you will not have far to go in Osaka. Here are we three who serve the Prince of Satsuma. He is a bold leader who loves bold followers. If you wish it I will take upon myself that you shall be enrolled among his retainers."

This was what Ichida had looked for and he accepted gladly.

"Since you accept," said the stranger, "be pleased to follow us to the camp which lies without the walls."

So Ichida accompanied his new-found companions. In the streets of the city he was struck by the number of armed men whom he met. Swordsmen and spearmen, men bearing bows or the *harquebuss* of the Portuguese, jostled each other in the narrow ways or chattered before the open-fronted shops. Once they stood aside as a procession came down the street bearing aloft the figure of a woman with a child. It was Ichida's first sight of the new religion, brought by the Spaniard, and adopted through all the southern lands. His companions bowed low to the figure; and Ichida, because he did not wish to be found wanting in politeness, bowed also.

So they reached the camp. And here Ichida became lost in wonder at the immense numbers of the army which had been

gathered together. There were many more than he could see at once. From far and near they had come, and now lay in multitudes spread across the plains in the form of a crescent. He learned afterwards that there were a hundred and twenty thousand assembled, but for the moment they appeared countless as the sands on the shore, bewildering by reason of their many coloured uniforms and the strange varieties of dialect that they spoke. It seemed to Ichida that to such a force no effective opposition could be offered, and his heart swelled with triumph and anticipation of coming victory.

His comrades led him to a part of the camp where the Satsuma men lay; and here an officer, after some questioning, took his name and enrolled him among the members of that clan. He was told also that since their tents were full, he might reside in the town until the army was ready to move; so, thinking of O Matsu and her dark eyes, he betook himself back to the house of Kira Nagamasa to ask for a lodging.

Now you must understand that Ichida, though he thought the girl pretty and good, had at that time no more than a young man's wayward fancy towards her. He never looked upon her as a possible wife. Such a thought would have shocked his sense of what was fitting; for was she not the daughter of a merchant, whilst he was a *samurai*, one whose trade was the noblest of all occupations, that of fighting? So, whilst he abode in the house of Kira, he treated her with a distant politeness intended to convey a hint of the distance between them.

Yet so charming was the girl's manner, so careful was she in her duty to her father and to her father's guest, that he could not withhold a certain kindness, nor was he scrupulous to hide his admiration of her beauty. His manner but inflamed O Matsu's passion. She felt the respect with which he regarded her, and sometimes dared to hope that he might look upon her with the eye of love. All this time, however, she said no word. Only she went about the house more quietly and the colour faded from her cheeks.

It was with peculiar jealousy that she noticed the affection with which Ichida regarded his famous sword. She saw that he was never tired of taking it up, looking closely into the red eyes of the demon curled around the handle, drawing the blade and feeling the edge with his thumb. At times, when he had left it in his room, she would creep in, and taking it in her hands, would gaze long and earnestly at it. It seemed to her as she looked into the face upon the handle, that the red eyes glowed with more than their usual fire, that they revealed new depths of

smouldering light far down within them, that they gave the whole face a sinister look which seemed particularly directed at her. This impression became stronger the more she looked at it, so that at last she grew afraid to take the thing up at all, but regarded it from a distance with an increasing fear.

At length the day arrived when the army was to set forth. Ichida left the house of his friends very early in the morning. O Matsu saw him go with a great bitterness in her heart; for he had spoken no word of love to her. Even as she bowed herself to the floor at the leave-taking, she realised that he thought of nothing beyond his sword and the prospect of the coming fight. Surely, she reflected, the weapon should bring him good fortune; for he placed it above all things in his estimation. The thought brought some little comfort to mingle with the pain caused by his departure.

Meanwhile Ichida went gaily to the camp, with scarce a regret for all that he was leaving behind him. He found it full of bustle and stir. Men were marching out upon the road to the north, leading to Kyoto where the castle of Fushima stood for Iyeyasu. Great cannon were being dragged along by teams of oxen. He glanced curiously at their hooped barrels as he hurried past to gain the place where the Satsuma men were assembling.

So they marched out to the attack upon Fushima. Men fought desperately that day, but none more desperately than Ichida. From the moment that the cannon battered the first breach in the wall to that in which the whole castle went up to the heavens in volumes of smoke and sparks, he knew no rest. The sword burned in his hand and fought like a thing alive. At the end of the day his whole soul went out to it in admiration, and he made a song in its praise. Yet even as he sang it came into his mind that he would have wished O Matsu present to hear of his deeds. He wondered if she thought of him. Had he known it, she thought of nothing else.

For some time the army rested. Ichida heard rumours of dissensions among its chiefs. He himself, wild with the lust of fighting, was for pushing on and striking a blow at Yedo itself. But among the leaders was uncertainty and diversity of opinion. Whilst some urged that they should go forward others advised delay, until Uesugi, lord of the northern province of Echigo, should join them according to his promise.

The first party fiercely retorted that they were already superior in numbers to the enemy; that Uesugi was holding himself back for some further sign of success; and that by striking boldly at Yedo they would secure that success and his allegiance.

Whilst they wrangled thus many followers of the camp had come with merchandise from Osaka. Among these came Kira Nagamasa and his daughter. Ichida, sitting before his tent one evening, looked up and beheld O Matsu bowing before him.

"O Matsu!" he cried joyfully, "I am glad to see you."

"You are not wounded?" she inquired, with a little drawing in of her breath.

"No," he answered, smiling, "thanks to the wonderful sword your father gave me."

Her forehead contracted slightly. "You are very fond of it," she said.

"It is a sword in a thousand, and worthy of its owner," he cried boastfully.

She smiled a little. "It is easy to see that it will serve you well," she answered, "since you value it so highly."

"Above all things," he replied, and, with the word, knew that it was untrue. He glanced at O Matsu, fearful lest she should have noticed the strange thrill in his voice. "Above all things," he repeated firmly, as if to propitiate the spirit of the sword. His eyes sought its handle and O Matsu's followed them.

"It smiles," she said. "I do not like its smile."

And in truth Ichida thought the same, though he did not say it. The thing was frightful to look at.

"Oh, I cannot bear it!" she cried, with a little shudder. "Sorrow is coming to you through it. Cast it away."

"Never," he answered, his pride in the blade returning.

"Well, then," she said, sadly, "I must see you no more."

Ichida knew then that she had discovered his thoughts. He did not speak. The girl waited for him to question, to reproach, but no sound came from his lips. With a gesture, tragic in its restraint, she bowed. He could not meet her eyes, but lowered his to the ground. When he raised them she was gone.

Whilst the army lay in camp he did not see her again. Nevertheless, she had left a seed planted in his heart that was to grow up to strength, disputing his love for his great weapon. For the present, however, the latter reigned supreme.

Some days later they began their march to the eastward. They took the Nakasendo road, to meet the forces of Iyeyasu that were reported to be drawing near.

It was at Seki-ga-hara that they first came in sight of them. The army of the southern princes moved over the plain towards the hills to the eastward. Afar off they saw the fluttering of flags and heard cries rendered very shrill by the distance. As though by its own accord, the army wavered, halting along its

front like some great serpent twisting upon the plain. In front of the ranks, the various leaders scanned the position of the enemy to see if there were any vulnerable point of attack. On the extreme left Ichida stood among the Satsuma men, his sword drawn, a fierce joy in its possession running through him. His whole soul sang the song he had made for it.

They moved on to the attack, and as they did so the enemy came down out of the hills with a wild whirling rush that swept them backwards, still struggling. For the rest of the day Ichida remembered nothing save a glut of fighting. He swung the sword about his head savagely, he marked the red eyes of the demon gleaming balefully as blood ran down the blade. The cannon thundered behind him, the glare of the matchlock fires spluttered in his eyes. As before, he was conscious of some curious increase of strength that seemed to come from his weapon. He saw that men avoided him, looking elsewhere for an easier conquest. So the night came on and the armies drew off for a little.

Ichida turned to cut down one whom he saw hiding behind a clump of bushes. The man saw him coming and raised an arquebuss. The blast of flame shot out, the smoke curled away into the air, and Ichida felt a stab in his right arm. With a cry he sprang forward, and at the same moment consciousness left him and he sank on the ground.

When he awoke it was night. He raised his eyes and looked round. He lay between the two armies. Along the horizon, the fires of his fellows burned dully, like the eyes of some many-headed beast awaiting its prey. To the east the enemy's lights answered them with equal menace. Ichida sat up. He felt dizzy and sick. Recollection came back upon him, and he wondered vaguely why the man who had wounded him had not stopped to kill him. A little sigh behind him caused him to turn, and he started as he beheld O Matsu. She sat patiently watching him, waiting until he should turn and see her. In her hand she held a dagger, and he knew as he saw it that through the long hours when he had lain there his safety had been due to her. Even as he thought of this a great wave of tenderness for the girl passed over him.

"O Matsu!" he cried, "what are you doing in this place?"

"I came down to find you," she replied, "I could not see you among the clan."

"You dared that for me?" he asked, a great wonder in his heart.

"Most honourable lord, it was not much," she answered.

"It was your life," he whispered.

"I am but a girl," she replied under her breath, "my life is of little value."

"Your father? Does he know of this?"

"He forbade it. I escaped. I have disobeyed him. Now I have no father. Did I not say that my life was of little value? There is no one to care for me."

"Oh, O Matsu," cried Ichida, struggling with the great weight of sorrow that was heavy in his breast for her, "do not say so. I am here to care for you. I care for you more than anything else that is in this world. I have known it since I last saw you, but I would not own it until this moment."

She came closer to him, and he put his arm about her to shield her from the wild loneliness of the night. Her head sank upon his shoulder with a little movement pathetic in its tired confidence. On the wide plain under the October stars they sat together, he forgetful of his wound, she of all that she had risked for his sake, knowing only their love for each other and their present happiness. After a time he spoke very low.

"I am not much hurt," he said. "To-morrow the battle will be joined again, and we shall be victorious. I will do mighty deeds. My master, the Prince of Satsuma, shall see me. He will give me rich rewards. Then I will marry you, and above all things in the world I will love and honour you."

A little shudder passed through the girl's frame. Ichida was startled by it, and turned to look at her face. She was gazing intently forward into the darkness, her face expressing both fear and repulsion. Ichida followed the direction of her eyes.

"At what do you look, O Matsu?" he asked.

"It is your sword," she whispered fearfully. "Look!"

As he looked he became aware of two small points of fire piercing the blackness of the night.

"Foolish one," he said, "it is but the jewels in the handle. They reflect the light."

"There is no light to reflect," she whispered; "then why do they shine like that?"

A curious fear crept over him. "I have seen them shine in the dark before," he said sullenly.

"That is not all," she answered. "Do you not see the face?"

"Nothing but the jewels."

She turned and hid her own eyes on his shoulder. "I am glad," she said, "I am glad you do not see the face."

Ichida looked at her anxiously. "You are tired," he said. "You have done too much for me. Now rest and get some sleep, and I will take my turn at watching. No harm shall come to you."

"It is not that," she said. "You know the story of the sword?"

"An idle tale," he answered, "the thing is but a piece of steel."

All at once the girl raised her head and peered forward again to where the sword lay. She looked as one who hoped against hope that her fears were groundless. Then she wrung her hands together in bitter resolve, and turned to Ichida.

"Honourable lord," she asked, "it is true then, that you prize me above the sword?"

"Above fifty swords," he answered.

She threw a triumphant glance into the darkness. "That is well!" she said, "now I will sleep."

Ichida watched her as she lay upon the ground. He too was very sleepy. Weariness of the day's battle, and loss of blood, had told upon his powerful frame, and he kept his eyes open only by a struggle. Had there been anything to look for, any enemy to fear, he might have endured; but the night was very quiet. At last his body swayed slightly, and he sank on the ground in slumber.

Then O Matsu arose from the sleep which she had shammed. In her eyes sorrow struggled with triumph and a great purpose. She cast but one glance at Ichida and then bowed low, wringing her hands again as if in agony. Then she turned to where the sword lay. In the darkness the face on the handle looked up to greet her, aware of her purpose, its lips twisted in a devilish smile. The eyes glowed and sparkled with hidden glints of fire, the forehead frowned in savage mockery.

In O Matsu's heart there was no fear. In her mind ran the words of her father, spoken to her long ago when first he told her the story of the sword. "Only the sacrifice of that which a man has placed above it can appease it," she said. She stretched out her arm and took up the blade.

In the half hour that precedes the dawn Ichida awoke. His first thought was for O Matsu. He turned to look at the place where she had lain. As he did so he saw her body. She lay face forwards on the ground, the sword sticking out at her back as she had fallen upon it. He made no movement as he saw her, but pondered the sight long, knowing its meaning too well. She had given her life for him, that the accursed thing that claimed it should not fail him in the coming fight. Well, it should have fighting such as it had never dreamed of!

He moved the dead body and looked down at the young face

turned up to meet his, very pinched and grey in the faint light of the morning sky. He put his foot on the girl's breast and grasped the handle, and the blade came out wet to its point. For a long time he stood so, looking down with the weapon in his hand, even as though he had killed her. In the east a faint light ran along the heavens, the chill of early dawn was in the air, little breezes smote his cheek as with the soft blows of a dead hand. Against the dawn one star glimmered, paling to its disappearance.

So the morning broke, very wan and cold, and Ichida went down to face the enemy. He fought that day as a desperate man fights whose happiness lies in front of him through the gates of death. All day long the hated sword flashed in his hand, doing its work as if it also felt that its end had come. Ichida did not think of it. His whole soul was far away, with the dead form of the girl who had sacrificed herself for his sake. Around him, his comrades, swept backwards by their enemies, fought with the courage of despair. Ichida joined group after group of these, and where he fought, his companions fell around him as if he brought misfortune with him. He himself went scatheless until he awoke to the consciousness of his impunity, and lifting his sword in bitterness, sang to it the song he had made for it; but this time with different words, taunting it, vaunting the very memory of the girl as dearer to him than all things else in the world.

And at last he was alone on the field. About fifty paces away a small group of the enemy watched him with intent eyes. They began to creep nearer, but slowly, for they knew his prowess. And Ichida, still singing, raised the sword aloft; for he knew this was the end; and as he raised it, it broke off short between blade and handle—and was useless.

The enemy were very near now.

J. SACKVILLE MARTIN.



Japanese Ghosts.

"Of course educated people do not believe these things." So said the good-looking young Japanese who, perfectly at ease in his well-fitting European clothes, and with a cigarette between his fingers, had been entertaining me with weird stories and ghostly superstitions of his country. "Only simple people, and—well—women."

"Your mother and sisters, for instance?"

"Yes," he admitted a little unwillingly, "my mother and sisters are old-fashioned. You see they live far away from Tokio in an old house near the sea, and in the winter there are strange noises. At one time they firmly believed the house to be haunted. I am afraid they were disappointed when I put an end to the little mystery. On winter nights a strange moaning sound was heard—no, it was not like the wind, it was more vibrating, had more of a thrill, it seemed to proceed from somewhere in the roof, and it terrified all the women of the house, who were persuaded that it was of supernatural origin. At last I investigated the garrets, and found an ancient spinning wheel. Evidently the rats, of which there were plenty, had set it whirling in their scrambles about the place, and so caused the mysterious sounds."

"But were they only heard in winter?"

"Ah, that I cannot tell you. That is what my mother inquired, and she has some mystical theory about it, I suspect, but she did not confide it to me—you see, I am a sceptic."

This story struck me as rather lame, after the manner of most natural explanation stories.

After a pause the conversation shifted to that ever-engrossing topic, the present state of affairs in the Far East, which my companion discussed with great intelligence and modesty. So Japan, the modern, the land of telephones and electric light, of new guns and warships, succeeded that other Japan, which is a dreamy ancient place, and a happy hunting ground for ghosts.

There, indeed, flourishes every variety of spectre, the ghost

pathetic, the ghost merely horrible and the ghost grimly humorous; the ghost that has a local habitation, together with his brother of extremest vagueness; the poetical ghost and the commonplace ghost (for there are commonplace ghosts), the ghost with a mission and the ghost that is aimless; the man ghost, the woman ghost (most often met with), the child ghost and the beast ghost. There are ghosts ethereal that fade at a glance, and ghosts of solidity that eat and drink and marry, and in fact conduct themselves in so human a manner that for years they pass as the genuine article, and are only at length detected by some slight peculiarity, such as a fondness for haunting apparently unattractive graveyards by night; or it may be that their heads have the habit of leaving their bodies inanimate, to patrol the country-side horribly alone.

Ghosts are generally depicted by Japanese artists as shadowy creatures, with white terrible faces, and loose hair. Their heads, with the expression of their features, are more or less distinct, but their figures become vague towards the feet, which are hidden from view by a weird greyish mist.

The Japanese stage ghost is a terrifying object. I remember once, as a child, prevailing upon my nurse to stand in the street that we might watch the *O Kagura*, a representation upon an open-air stage, in connection with a temple, and I should imagine in some degree resembling our own old miracle plays. On this occasion a ghost appeared upon the boards—a sinuous creature, unearthly tall, with long Medusa-like locks, and a ghostly mask for a face. It danced—if its soundless glidings and beckonings may so be called—and at length came and leaned over the wooden rail of the stage. I cannot describe the horror of it, as it stood there in its trailing damask garments pictured over with hideous symbols. It shook its head at the audience in general, or, as I fancied, at my miserable self, and its hair seemed to stand up and be alive.

This apparition haunted me for several nights, and would doubtless have terrified me much more, if it had not been for my nurse. She was a sensible woman, and realised at an early date that the *O Kagura* exercised a powerful and not altogether beneficial fascination over me. Therefore she, one day, boldly took me round to the stage door, and we entered a sort of shanty where the actors were masking. Of course we had not the slightest business to be there, but no Japanese can resist a child, and the half-dozen men who were present smiled upon me. After a little parley, one of them took me by the hand, and my nurse, promising to return soon, departed, shutting the door behind her.

Presently my friend donned a fearful mask, representing a lion's head with a scarlet mane. But he lifted it to grin at me reassuringly, and then conducted me up a step ladder on to the stage, and seated me in a corner by the railings. His companions followed, and the play began. It was realistic, but I was not afraid, for I saw quite close the homely blue cotton *tabi* (socks) and leggings of the lion. My nurse stood below with the crowd, who, if I had but known it, were fully as much diverted with the spectacle of a "foreign child" as with the play itself.

But to return to real ghosts. There is an especially ghostly season in Japan. This is the time of the great *Bon* Festival (about July 16th), when the souls of the dead return to this earth. Every grave is adorned with flowers and lighted lanterns; every household shrine is prepared for its shadowy visitant, and suitable food is cooked and laid ready. On hill and headland also, are lighted the fires of the dead, and still in villages and country places are the souls made welcome with weird chant, mystic nocturnal dancing and many pale lanterns. And at the time of their departure, when they must once more set out for the unknown, there are plaited for them straw boats with flowers, in which they are launched down the river, or out to sea, at the hour of sunrise. And all the people stand upon the shore to see them go.

There is a god who cares for the souls of children—*Jizo Sama*—whose shrine and image are often seen upon the highway, for he is also the protector of pilgrims. Now all children, when they die, go to the *Sai-no-Kawara*, which is like a sandy river bed, there to pile up stones for a penance. But wicked ogres knock down the stone piles as soon as they are built, also they hurt and frighten the children, and *Jizo* cares for the poor little ones, and hides them with his long sleeves, and he plays with them so that they may not be unhappy in the river-bed. So mothers and children in this upper world gladly make offerings to *Jizo*, and pile stones about the feet of his image, for this will help the little ghosts in the *Sai-no-Kawara*.

There is a sea cave upon a little explored shore of old Japan, where stands an image of *Jizo*. And on the rocky ledges round about, and on the sandy floor, are towers of stones and pebbles. These are the work of the children's ghosts, that come to the cave by night, for every morning their fresh foot-prints are to be seen upon the sand. Always the marks of small bare feet, though pious people have left straw sandals in the cave to keep their tender flesh from the rocks.

Sometimes a mother is able to recall the departed soul of her

child; she prays very much, and in the eyes of the next treasure that is given to her, she recognises the spirit of her firstborn; or it may be that by some slight birth-mark she is assured.

Lovers also have their own ghostly beliefs, and act upon them fearlessly. For, if a young man and a girl love one another, and their love is unhappy, they often die together, either by poison, or by drowning, or by the sword, for thus their spirits will surely be united in the *Meido*. But they leave a message asking to be buried together, for otherwise how is it possible for them to obtain rest? They believe that their sorrow is caused by some unknown sin, committed in another life, and that this dying is the only expiation.

There is a well-known story of a man who fell in love with a beautiful ghost. His name was Ito Tatewaki, and he was young, a gallant man, and a *samurai*. He was returning homeward, on foot, from a journey, and it chanced that as night fell he found himself alone upon a deserted road, at the foot of Mount Kotohiki. The high grass was upon his either hand, and through it the wind shivered and moaned, and that was the only sound he heard. He walked with his eyes on the ground, for he thought intently of the important family affairs that had been the occasion of his journey. At length, looking up, he saw, a few yards ahead of him, the figure of a young girl. She was alone, and flitted along the path before him with a singularly graceful motion, her feet hardly seeming to touch the ground. By her dress he judged her to be the upper servant, or companion, of some lady of rank.

Tatewaki quickened his steps, and soon gained her side; he addressed her in a gentle tone so as not to startle her, expressed some surprise that she should venture out at nightfall and unprotected in so lonely a place, and finally offered to bear her company to her destination. She accepted, so they walked on, conversing together of many things. Tatewaki observed that the maid had a delicate and pale complexion, and a winning, though timid, speech, also that her *kimono* was crossed over from right to left, instead of from left to right, as is usual; but this last, though he saw it with his eyes, he did not observe with his brain, else had he perhaps been spared many things.*

They walked a great way, and the moon was risen, so that everything was very clear and plainly to be seen, when at last they came to a small house that stood in a garden, and there were lilies in the garden, and other flowers. The maid stopped and said, "My mistress lives here." Then Tatewaki bade her

* The garments of the dead are so folded.

farewell, and made to go on his way. But she answered, "Nay, my mistress waits for you—she has waited a long time—follow me."

So he went into the house after her, and into a fair-sized room, with mats upon the floor, where was an aged woman, with a young and very beautiful lady; this latter was standing in the light, close to a round window, and when Tatewaki saw the lady, that instant he loved her, and also he was afraid. But the old woman greeted him kindly, and the lady called him by his name, and spoke so sweetly that he loved her more and more. She was named the Lady Chidori (that is plover or dotterel), and they two talked together almost all the night long.

About an hour before dawn, the old woman spread a feast, bringing *saké*, and silver *saké*-cups, and Tatewaki and the Lady Chidori drank the three times three, as it is ordered, and became man and wife. Then after this the Lady Chidori began to weep bitterly, and to lament, and she said, "I am sad, my lord, because we must part, for I go to the plains, where my people are, but you may not follow me, because the time is not come. But I give you a token—do not be sorrowful, for in ten years we may meet again." So she left him, as he sank into a deep sleep.

When he awoke it was morning; he lay upon the bare hill-side, the lower slope of Mount Kotohiki. There was no house, and no garden, nor any living person near, but the token was in his hand. And immediately he went down to the plains to seek for the Lady Chidori, but he found nothing at all but old, old graves, with grass and nettles growing between. And he went to the temple that was near, and the priest brought out ancient books, and they searched in them for a long time, and they found the name of the Lady Chidori, and the name of her father, and the names of all her people; but the whole of them had been dead for more than a hundred years.

Then Tatewaki understood that he had loved a spirit. So he went quietly to his own home, and, being a good man, he did his work daily, and praised the gods. But he never loved any woman, nor took a wife, though his friends urged it.

So the ten years wore away. And on the last night of the tenth year he walked sorrowfully in his garden, and, looking up, he saw the light figure of a girl that flitted gracefully towards him, and he knew that it was she with whom he had walked at the foot of Mount Kotohiki. She said, "Prepare yourself, for my mistress awaits you." Then she vanished. And the next morning Tatewaki was found beneath a tree of the garden, dead—and smiling.

Here is another story.

There was once a man who had two sons, and when he was old and felt his end drawing near, he called them to him and said: "My sons, you know that I am old and weary of living, so be not too sorrowful when I tell you that my death is at hand; and when I shall be dead, do not wear yourselves out in mourning for me, only, I pray you, reverence my memory, and sometimes visit my tomb to pray the gods for me, and to pour water for the dead." And both his sons promised him this with tears. So the father died, and for many days the young men mourned and went to the grave together, and prayed, and poured the water for the dead. And after some time they put up a fine grey stone, and upon it they carved the new name of their father—the name that is given after death.

Then the eldest son said to his brother, "I can no longer waste my time here in the graveyard, for there is much good business and many things for me to do, and besides, I intend to take a wife. Therefore I shall plant the day lily, the orange flower of forgetfulness, and I shall count my duty finished." And the younger brother said nothing, but he came so much the more to his father's tomb, weeping and praying, and pouring water; and he planted the purple valerian, which is for remembrance, and so he was faithful to his promise. And once, while he kneeled, there was suddenly a great radiance about the grave, and an awful voice spoke, as it seemed, from the bowels of the earth, so that the young man was afraid, and hid his face in the grass.

And the voice said, "I am the spirit who cares for your father's bones. I know you for a good son and a faithful and an honest man, a keeper of your word; therefore I will especially protect you. Go home now, and do not be afraid, for all through life you shall prosper."

So the young man went back to his house with gladness, and that night he was warned in a dream of the things that should happen on the next day, and it was shown him what he should do, so that in everything he might decide wisely and act well. So it was all his life long, and he became very rich and prosperous, and his children after him.

There is one place in Japan, where the chrysanthemum, the bright imperial flower, is considered a thing of evil omen. For its name is *kiku*, and here there lived a serving maid called after it—Kiku, whose unquiet ghost still haunts a deep well in the neighbourhood. It seems this girl had ten valuable plates of fine china entrusted to her care, one of which, by accident, she broke. And because of her grief, or because she stood in terror

of her mistress, she threw herself down the well and was drowned. This was many years ago, but still of nights her voice is heard, tremulously counting over the precious plates: "One—two—three—four—five—six—seven—eight—nine!" then a pause and a scream of terror, followed by a miserable weeping and lamentation. And the poor voice begins again: "One—two—three—four——" and so on, in the darkness.

The bamboo, also, is particularly felicitous. But a poor child once gave her father a parting gift of a little bamboo flute. During his absence in the distant city whither he went, his daughter was cruelly done to death through the machinations of a wicked stepmother, and from that hour the little flute would play no more airs; only, when the father put it to his lips, it spoke pitifully of his dead child.

Here follows the tale of the phantom of Nabéshima.

There lived once a great *Daimyo* of Nabéshima, who was powerful and rich, but he was prey to a wasting sickness, and every day he became paler and more listless. The physicians could not say what ailed him. Now there was a guard set about him of picked warriors, and the guard never left him by day, and by night it watched in his chamber, for it was thought that in the darkness some evil thing gained a power over the *Daimyo*, and caused his sickness. But about the hour of the ox (two to four in the morning—the special hour for ghosts) a weariness came over the guards, and their eyelids were weighed down, and perforce they sank into a deep sleep. And when they awoke it was the hour of the tiger (4 a.m.), and their lord lay wan and exhausted upon his pillow, so they knew that fresh evil had been done, and cursed their weakness, for they were all loyal men. But the next night, at the hour of the ox, they slept again.

Now there was a young man and a soldier, called Itô Sôda; he loved the *Daimyo* with his whole soul, and grieved to see him every day more sick and nearer to his grave, and he wished that he might watch beside his lord's bed, but being a simple man-at-arms, he could not aspire to that honourable post. Therefore, he washed at the well in the garden, and thus purified, prayed fervently to Buddha for the health of his master, and one night Buiten, the priest of Buddha, saw him, and speaking to him, learnt the wish of his heart, and so it was granted to him to mount guard in the bedchamber of the *Daimyo*.

Itô Sôda took his place among the picked warriors, who disposed themselves for vigil. They played chess, or told tales, conversed together, or composed odes, and passed the time pleasantly. But Itô Sôda kneeled in a corner, with his sword before him, and

he prayed to the gods. Now at the hour of the ox the air grew heavy with an unearthly fragrance, and upon each man came an oppression that could not be withstood, so that they all fell dead asleep, one with his hand upon the piece, another mumbling his just completed hemistitch. Only Itô Sôda was prepared. Already half-unconscious and with hands that groped, he drew his dagger and plunged it into his thigh, and the pain roused him. But soon drowsiness came once more upon him, and things in the chamber loomed large and indistinct. He grasped the dagger hilt and twisted it so that the blade worked in the wound, and he woke and waited.

Presently the doors of the room slid apart, and the head of a beautiful girl appeared, looking carefully about. Seeing that the guard slept, the face smiled fearfully, and its owner glided in and gained the bedside of the *Daimyo*—he moaning in his sleep. Itô Sôda saw that the woman had no feet, and knew her for a spectre.

She leaned over the *Daimyo* and laid her face close to his, so that her loose hair fell upon him, and she whispered to him hideous dreams, so that he shuddered and rolled upon his bed. And all the while she bewitched him and drew his youth and health away. But the young soldier crept stealthily along the mats till he gained her side, and then he boldly plunged his sword into her breast. She gave no cry, neither was there spilt one drop of blood, but she changed immediately into a monstrous black cat with fiery eyes, and leaping through the *shogi*, incontinently escaped to the mountains.

The *Daimyo* recovered from his sickness, and Itô Sôda was promoted to great riches and honour.

In conclusion : a story of fairy foxes.

A kind-hearted countryman once rescued a fox cub from some children who had cruelly caught it, wounding it with a stone, and intending to sell it to one who would kill it and use its flesh for food. He took the little cub in his arms, healed its wound with a herb that grew by the wayside, and fed it with rice from his own wallet. When he had done this, he looked up and saw the father and mother foxes sitting close by and watching him. So he delivered their child to them. Then he went to his own home.

Some time afterwards it chanced that his only son fell sick, and the wise man, who was called in to see the child, ordered for his health the liver taken from a live fox. This only would cure him. Then the father was very sorry, and he said to his wife : "There is nothing for it—the child must die, for even for my son's sake, I cannot tear in pieces a living animal." And all that

day the child grew worse, and never ceased crying very piteously so that his parents' hearts were broken.

And at evening time there came a man to the house, travelling on foot, and he bore a casket, and he gave it to the father and said, "I am a messenger from your friend who lives in the mountains, he has procured this live fox's liver, so give it to your son that he may live." Then the wise man made a medicine of the liver and gave it to the child, who immediately became much better, and rose and played in the room. And the father made much of the messenger and begged him to remain the night at his house, but he would not, and turned his face homewards to the mountains, the countryman calling after him many messages for his friend who indeed dwelt there.

In a few days, the little child being quite well, and running and shouting lustily, the friend who lived in the mountains chanced to go by, and the father ran to him and bowed before him to thank him, and pointing to the child, he said: "But for you, he would be already in his grave." The other was astounded, and asked: "Has the child then been ill?"

And afterwards he denied that he had sent anything, neither any messenger, and all this was new to him.

That night the countryman dreamed, as he slept by his wife, and in his dream a woman sat by his pillow, weeping. She said: "I am a fox, and mother to that cub you saved, and you healed the wound in his little foot, and gave him of your own rice; now out of gratitude have we slain him, his father and I, we have slain our son that yours might live. Gladly we did it—oh, very gladly we did it!" But even as she spoke she wept bitterly, and then she vanished.

And the countryman awoke sobbing, and he awoke his wife also, and they wept together.

And afterwards they caused their son to make a shrine to Inari, the fox god, and he laid offerings there every day.

G. J.
